

HOW TO MAKE THE WORLD'S MOST FLAVORFUL SOUP page 28

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54
CLASSIC
RECIPES
*to Celebrate
Spring!*

Best Cakes Ever

**Blue-ribbon bakers share
their secrets for red velvet,
coconut, lemon, and other
fantastic layer cakes**

page 52

13 Italian Appetizers

Stuffed peppers, fried
artichokes, rosemary
shrimp, and more

page 60

New England Comfort Food

Luscious and warming
baked beans, chock-full
of bacon and molasses

page 38



145

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MARCH 2012

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island mussels*

*kumamoto
oysters*

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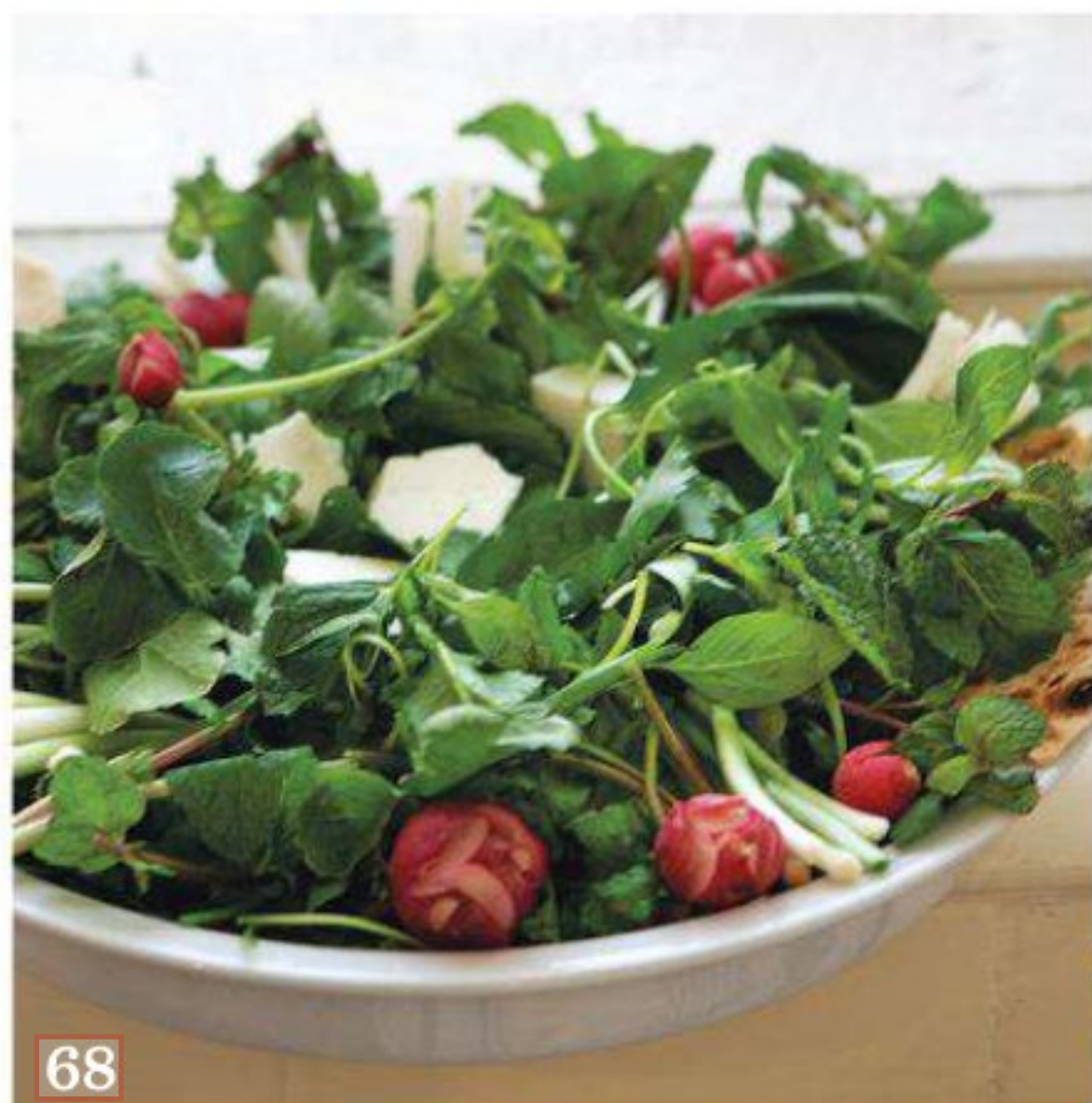
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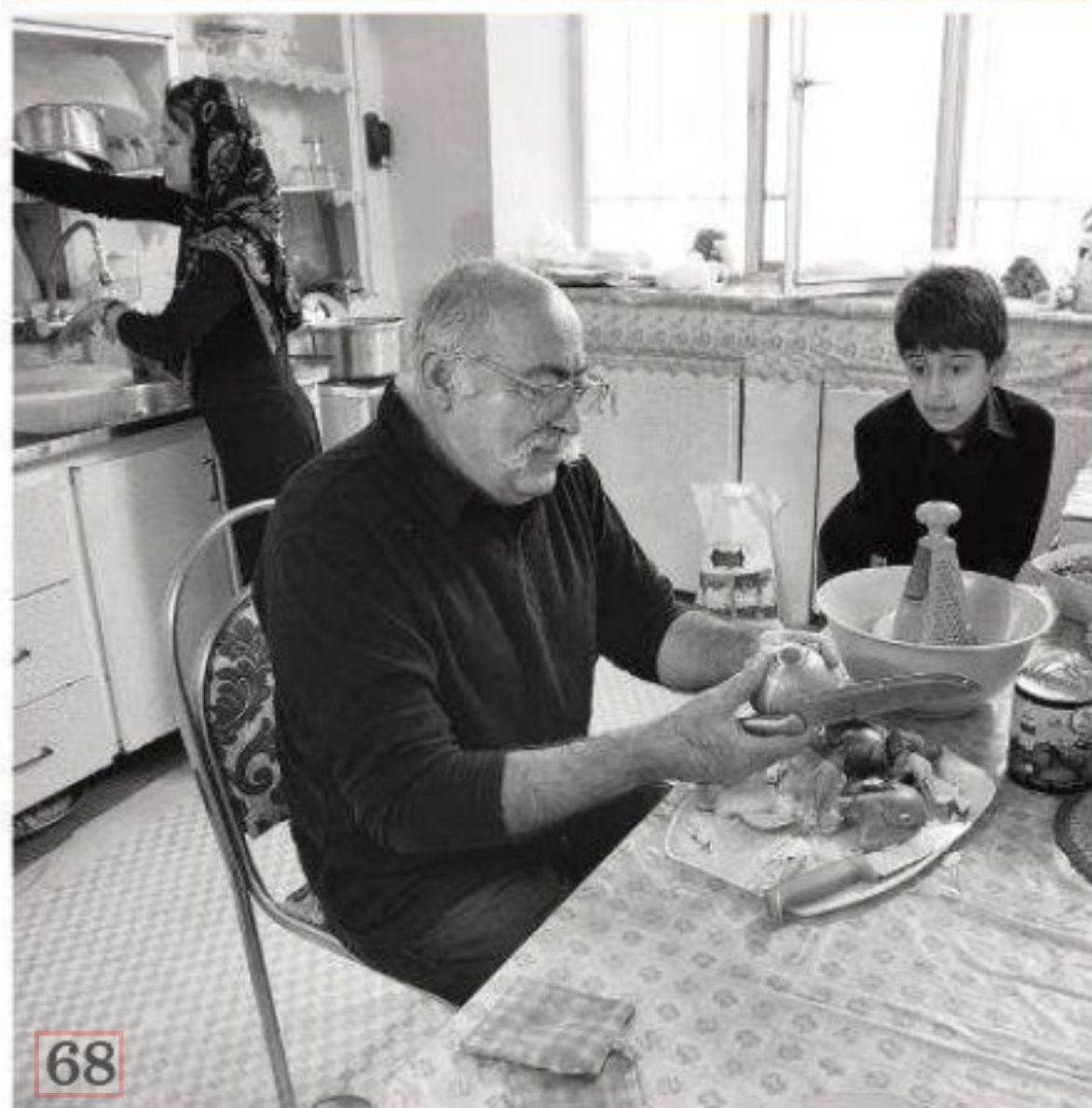
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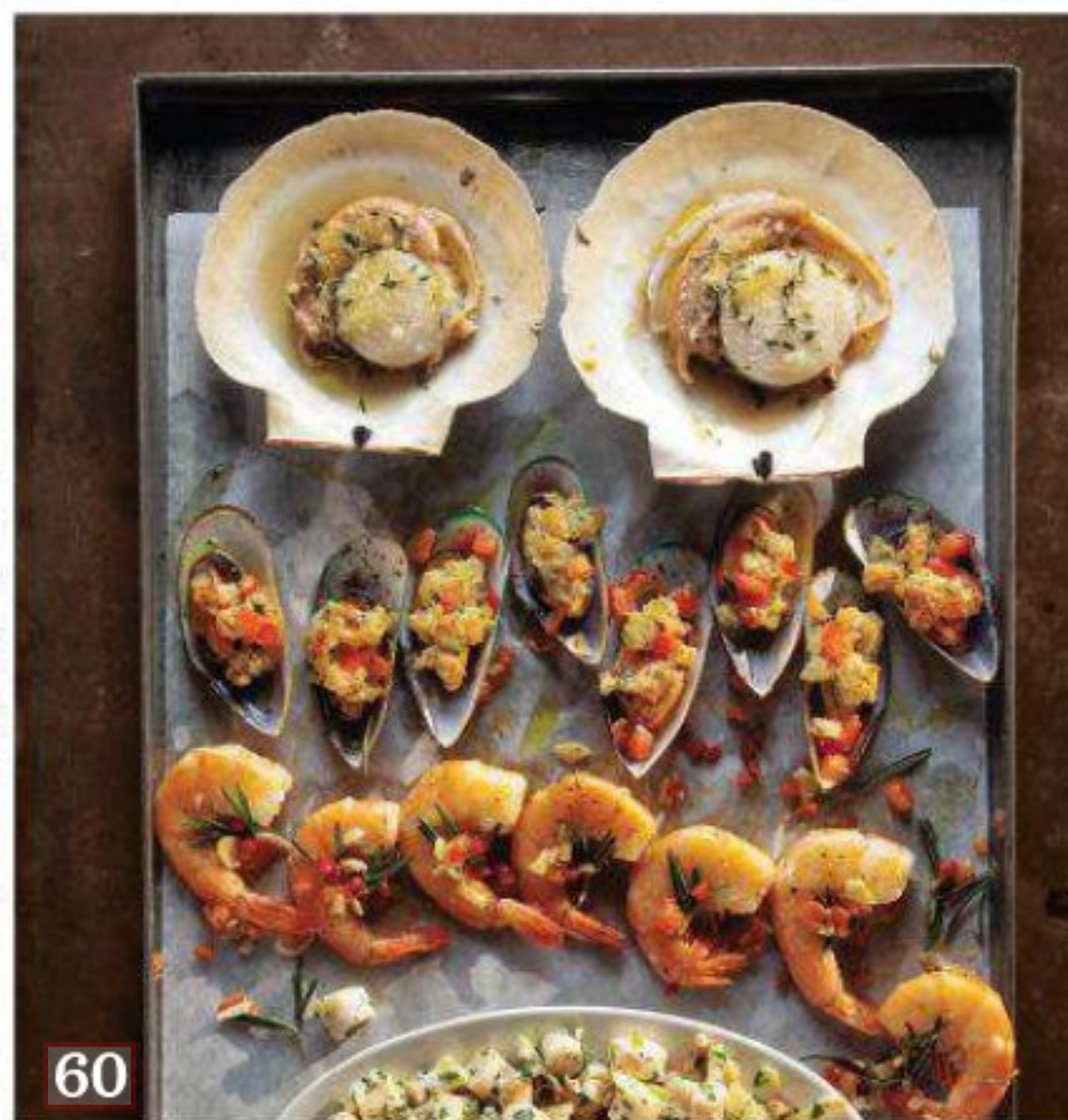
52



40



68



60



40

Features

40 **Eternal Terrain**
A visit to the Transylvania countryside reveals a culinary culture that seems untouched by time. From plum brandy to soulful chicken soup with dumplings, the region's rustic cuisine is a marvelous mix of Hungarian, Romanian, and Saxon influences. *By Alexander Lobrano*

52 **Sweet Southern Dreams**
A baker considers how a childhood

steeped in the pageantry of Southern layer cakes—towering red velvet, snowy-white coconut, tangy lemon—shaped the direction of his life. Plus, tried-and-true recipes and techniques every home baker should know. *By Ben Mims*

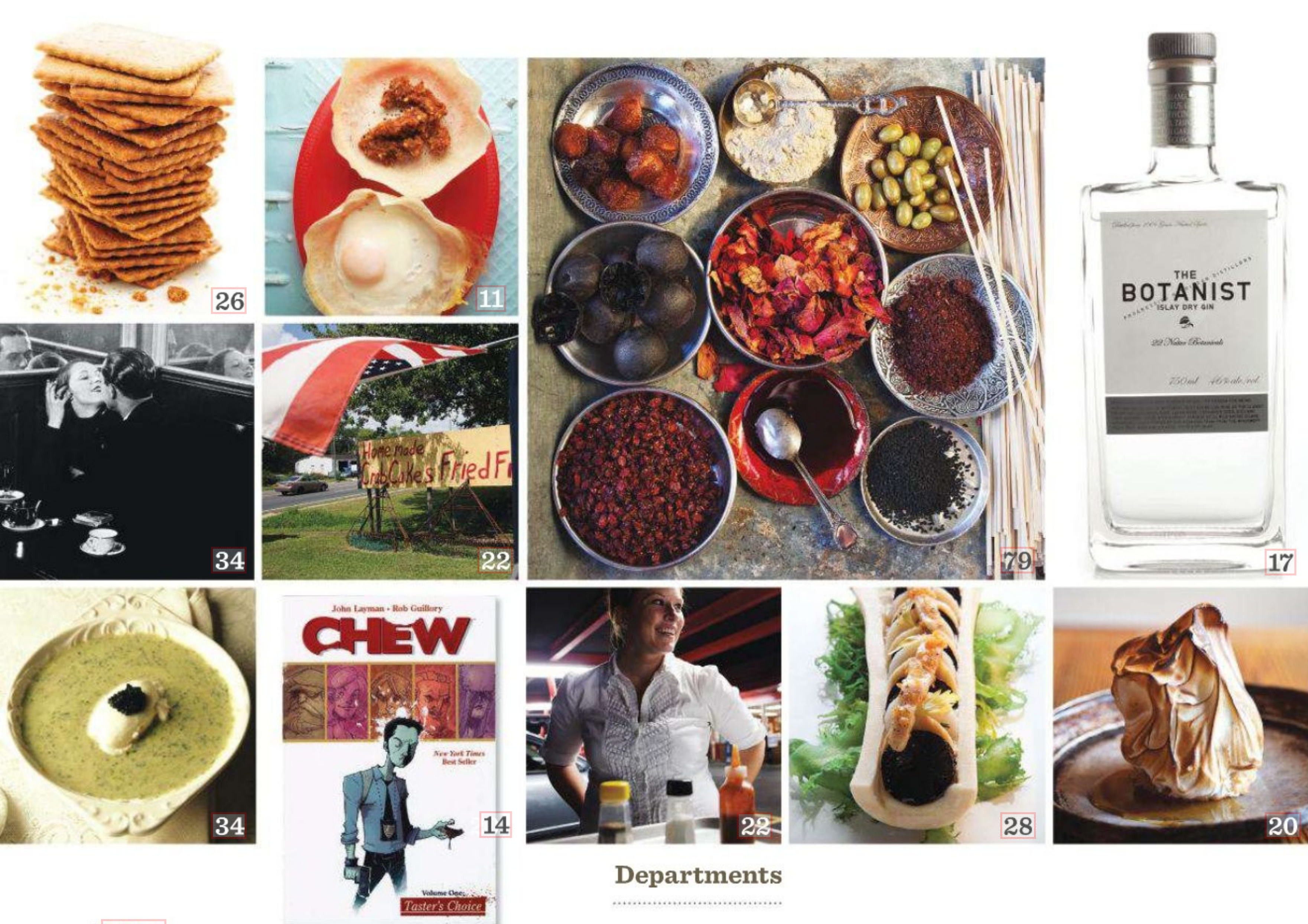
60 **Good and Plenty**
In Venice, the custom of eating *cicheti*—addictive one-bite snacks, such as creamy salt cod with polenta and deep-fried

meatballs—offers a road map for entertaining with small, savory dishes. *By Dana Bowen*

68 **Land of Bread and Spice**
With its fragrant rice pilafs scented with saffron and rose water, tomato and yogurt-marinated chicken kebabs with coriander and cumin, garlicky eggplant pickles, and more, Iran's ancient cuisine is as bold and beautiful as ever. *By Anissa Helou*

Cover Red velvet cake PHOTOGRAPH BY TODD COLEMAN

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Departments

8 First

Tying the knot, with noodles and coconut cake.
By James Oseland

11 Fare

Sri Lankan hoppers, Japanese sugars, culinary comics, Rochester's garbage plate; plus One Good Bottle, Agenda, and more.

20 Review

Chef Ana Sortun's Cambridge restaurants, Oleana and Sofra, reimagine the flavors of the Mediterranean. *By Corby Kummer*

22 Routes

Fresh seafood, heirloom sweet potatoes, and sumptuous cake represent the bounty of Virginia's Eastern Shore. *By Jane and Michael Stern*

26 Source

These buttery, honey-kissed graham crackers take the snack to new heights. *By Jane Black*

28 Ingredient

Rich *brodo*, braised lamb shanks, and more essential recipes showcase the beauty, versatility, and haunting mystique of bones. *By Mei Chin*

34 Essay

Retracing a culinary love affair with Paris, one

book at a time. *By Aleksandra Crapanzano*

38 Classic

In New England, baked beans is a beloved dish that has stood the test of time. *By Gabriella Gershenson*

79 In the Saveur Kitchen

Steamed brown bread, bone marrow, Iranian

ingredients, and chicken lollipops.

84 Pantry

How to find the ingredients, equipment, and resources in this issue. *By Ben Mims*

88 Moment

A sanguine meal in Transylvania. *Photograph by Landon Nordeman*

Fare	Mititei (Grilled Sausages).....	50	Southern Cakes		
Hoppers (Sri Lankan Crêpes with Onion Sambol and Egg).....	Prăjitură cu Caise (Apricot Cake).....	51	Caramel Cake.....	66	
	Secărică (Caraway Brandy).....	51	Coconut Cake.....	66	
Routes	Supă cu Galuște (Chicken Soup with Semolina Dumplings).....	51	Lemon Layer Cake.....	66	
Crab Imperial.....	Székelyváltás (Pork with Apples and Cider Cream Sauce).....	51	Red Velvet Cake.....	66	
Smith Island Cake.....	Tuică de Prune (Fermented Plum Brandy).....	51	Walnut Spice Cake.....	67	
Essay					
Cream of Watercress Soup.....			Iran		
	Cicheti		Ash-e Reshteh (Iranian Noodle Soup).....	76	
Classic	Arancini Veneziani (Venetian Rice Fritters).....	66	Baghali Ghatogh (Lima Beans with Dill and Eggs).....	76	
New England-Style Baked Beans.....	Baccalà Mantecato (Grilled Polenta with Dried Cod Mousse).....	66	Borani-e Bademjan (Eggplant and Yogurt Dip).....	76	
Ingredient	Cappesante al Forno (Baked Scallops with Parmesan).....	66	Ghormeh Sabzi (Veal and Kidney Bean Stew).....	76	
Braised Lamb Shanks.....	Cozze al Pomodoro (Stuffed Mussels).....	66	Jujeh Kabab (Spiced Chicken and Tomato Kebabs).....	76	
Brodo (Beef Broth with Tortellini and Parmesan).....	Fondi di Carciofi (Bacon-Wrapped Artichokes).....	67	Khosh-e Fesenjan (Chicken and Walnut Stew).....	75	
Chicken Lollipops.....	Gamberi al Rosmarino (Shrimp with Pancetta and Rosemary).....	67	Kuku Sabzi (Leek and Herb Frittata).....	77	
Deviled Baby Back Ribs.....	Insalata di Polpo (Octopus Salad).....	67	Kufteh (Herb Meatballs in Tomato-Plum Sauce).....	77	
Mare e Monte (Scallops and Truffles with Beef Marrow).....	Mozzarella in Carozza (Fried Mozzarella Sandwiches).....	67	Mast-o Khair (Yogurt and Cucumber Dip).....	77	
	Peperoni con Acciughe (Stuffed Cherry Peppers).....	67	Shirin Polow (Iranian Rice Pilaf).....	77	
Transylvania	Polpette (Meat Croquettes).....	67	Tah Chin (Baked Rice with Barberries).....	77	
Ciorbă de Perisoare (Pork-and-Rice Meatball Soup).....	Sarde in Saor (Sweet and Sour Sardines).....	67	Torshi-e Liteh (Eggplant and Herb Pickle).....	77	
Chec cu Nucă (Romanian Walnut Panettone).....	Tramezzini (Venetian Tea Sandwiches).....	67	Torshi-e Kalam (Pickled Cabbage and Dill).....	77	
Csirkepaprikás (Chicken with Paprika).....	Zucchini Ripiene (Stuffed Zucchini).....	67	Torshi-e Piaz (Red Onion and Herb Pickles).....	77	
Mămăligă cu Smântână (Romanian Polenta with Sour Cream).....			Kitchen		
			Beef Marrow Bones with Fried Parsley.....	80	
			Brown Bread.....	83	



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Publication Agreement Number: 40612608

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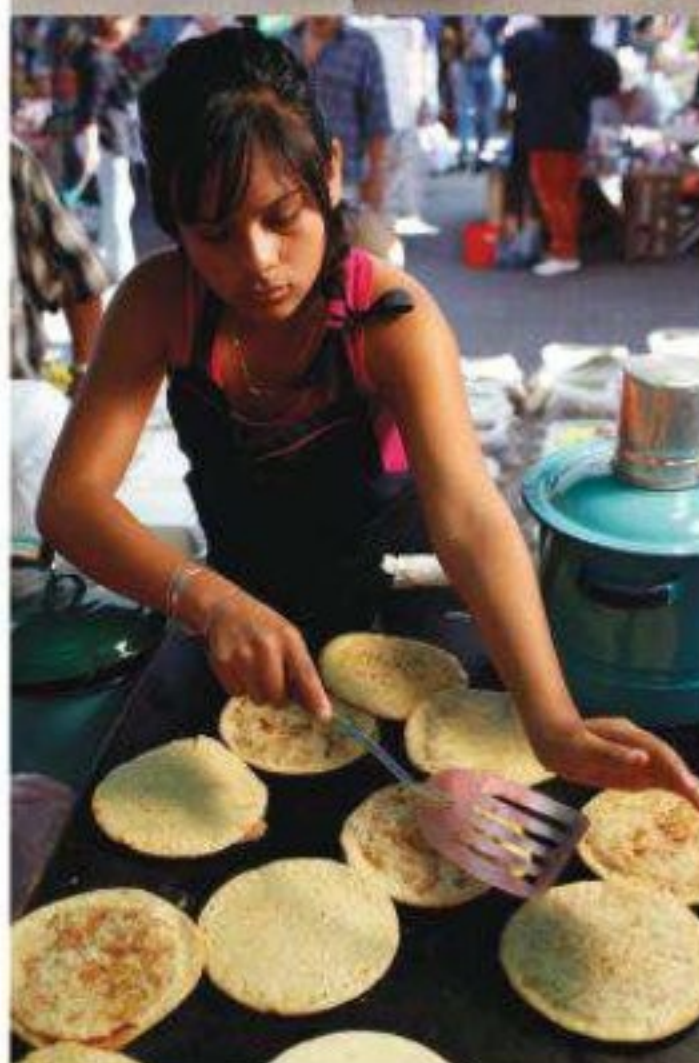
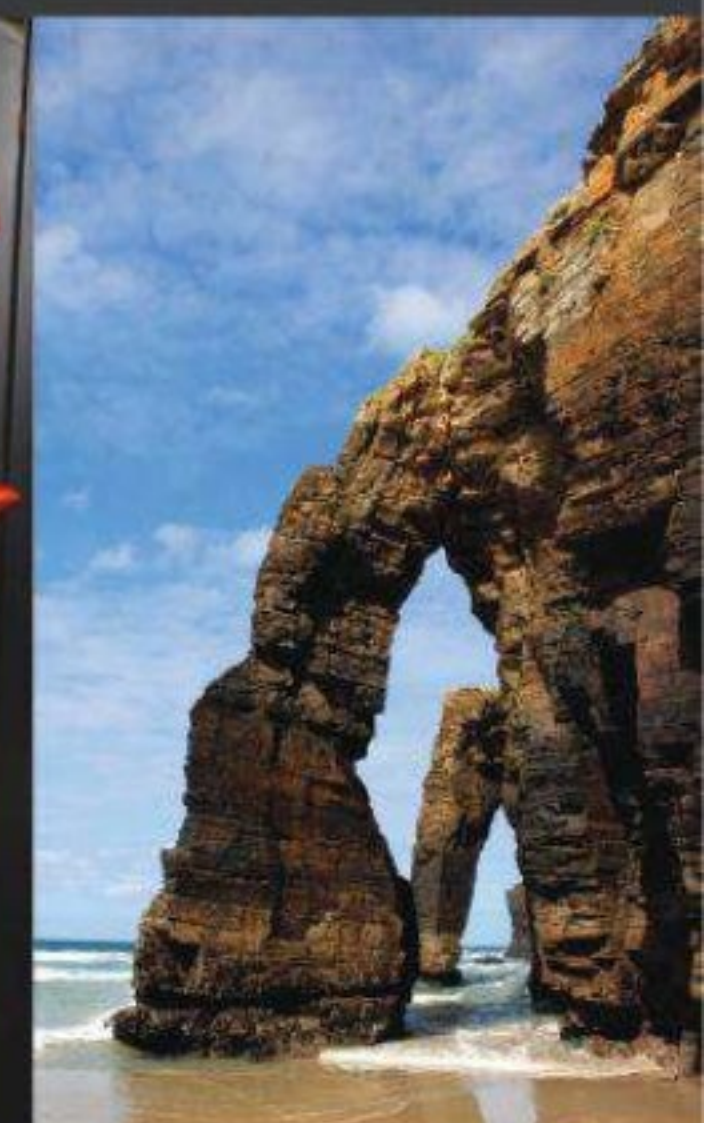
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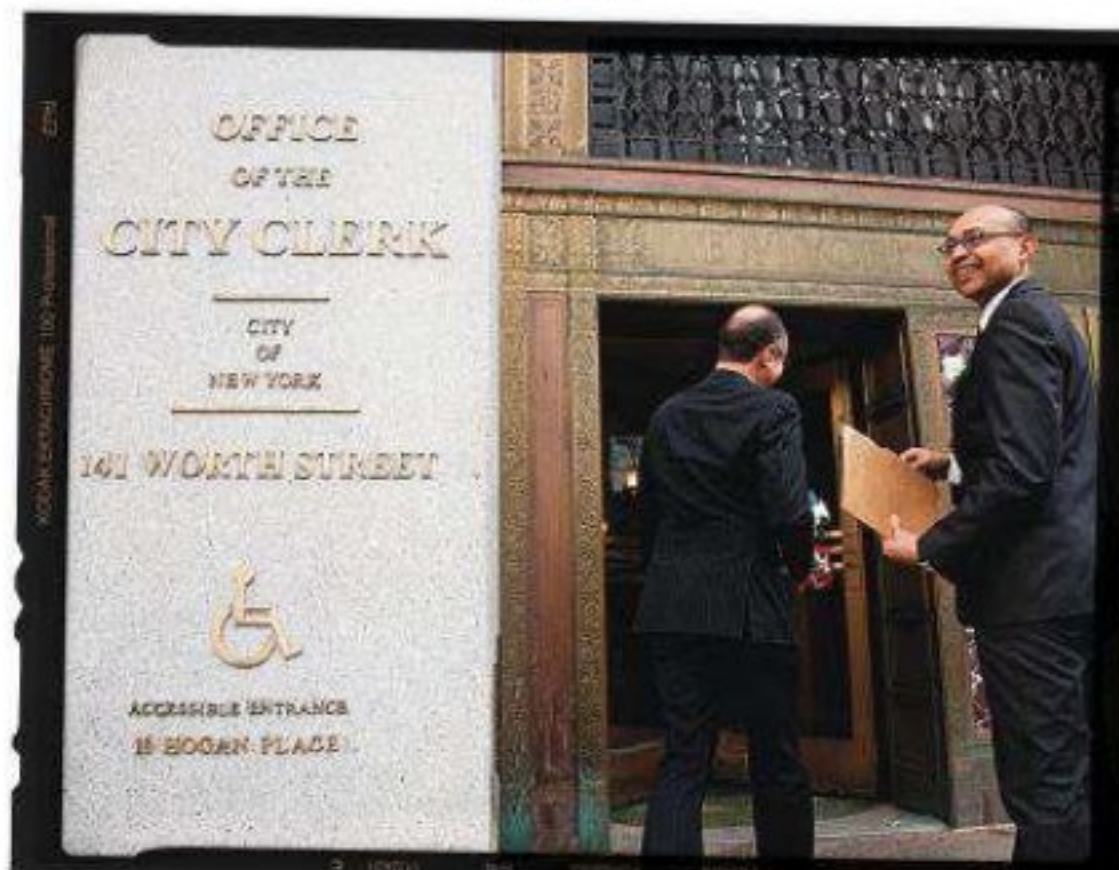


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FIRST



The Wedding Feast

Love and marriage and one magnificent cake

PERHAPS YOU'RE SURPRISED to open this issue of *SAVEUR* and see a wedding album. But amid all the page proofs that have been circulating around the office recently, these photos have been making the rounds, too. The whole *SAVEUR* staff was on hand, along with a dozen or so other good friends, when I married Carlos Daniel Dos Santos, my partner of nearly five years, on December 22, 2011. In a way it surprised even me. Whatever your feelings about gay marriage are—I'll confess that until recently my own were sort of blithely indifferent—any wedding is an event charged with significance. And though we didn't deliberately choose 2011's winter solstice for our celebration, as the date approached, the notions traditionally associated with that day—rebirth, darkness giving way to light, a new beginning—resonated with gathering force.

That's Daniel and me in the upper left-most photo (I'm the one fixing Daniel's tie), preparing to depart for the rather forbidding-sounding Office of the City Clerk, in New York City. The reality of the place

wasn't forbidding at all. We arrived to find the wedding guests, a crowd of familiar faces grinning as broadly as we were, assembled in front of the building. There was *SAVEUR* contributor Harris Salat with his wife, Momoyo Torimitsu, and 11-month-old son, Gen, kibbitzing with fellow writer Francine Prose and Thor Stockman, my friend of more than 30 years. The party had already begun, spontaneously, and that spirit of sheer glee carried us through the rest of the day. After a brief but emotional ceremony, we gathered for a group portrait and then walked en masse to Chinatown and pushed several tables together at Excellent Pork Chop House, a truly excellent Taiwanese place and the first restaurant in which Daniel and I ever sat down to eat a meal together.

Over plates of braised pork and pickled mustard greens, noodles of all sorts, spare ribs floating in herbal broth, and so much more, champagne corks popped and toasts were raised. As you might expect, the centerpiece of the meal—of the whole day, really—was a cake. And yet, again, I was taken by sur-

prise. Associate food editor Ben Mims had baked it himself—a sweet, white cloud of a layer cake swathed in fluffy meringue frosting and freshly grated coconut, the kind he grew up eating in Mississippi. (For more on that, please read "Sweet Southern Dreams" on page 52, Ben's ode to the cakes of his childhood.) As if the cake itself wasn't enough to bring tears to our eyes, planted on top were two tiny, tuxedoed grooms purchased for the occasion by executive editor Dana Bowen, and a cat hand-painted by associate editor Karen Shimizu to look like our cat, Sam; assistant website editor Anna Stockwell, I later learned, had earlier endured a bumpy taxi ride across the city with the cake balanced on her knees. Daniel and I were floored by this beautiful and loving and unbelievably delicious gift, and again by the faces of our friends all around us, laughing and talking and smeared in sticky frosting. "You have to freeze a slice to eat on your first anniversary!" Dana insisted. But we joyfully devoured the leftovers later that night. —JAMES OSELAND, *Editor-in-Chief*

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FARE

Ideas and Idylls From the World of Food, Plus Agenda and More

Party Food

For Sri Lankan ex-pats, hoppers foster community

OF ALL THE FOODS MY SRI LANKAN husband has introduced me to, *appa*, or hoppers, are my favorite. On my first trip to his country, I gorged on the bowl-shaped crêpes, made from a yeasty batter of rice flour and coconut milk. I ate them filled with steamed eggs for breakfast, with fiery onion-chile paste for lunch, and for dinner with a little *seeni sambol*, caramelized onions mixed with Maldive fish, smoked and air-dried tuna. For

dessert? Yup, suffused with smoky-sweet palm syrup. Though they resemble French crêpes, and many of Sri Lanka's foods were brought to the island by colonists, the origin of hoppers is unclear.

Traditionally, hoppers were cooked at home over coconut-shell embers. Since the end of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009, the

Hoppers with onion sambol (top) and steamed egg (see [page 12](#) for a recipe).

AGENDA

March 2012

2-4

BOCKFEST 2012

Cincinnati, Ohio

The country's largest and oldest celebration of bock beer, a German style that celebrates winter's end, and



dopplebock, the Lenten lager first brewed by medieval Trappist monks, is now in its 20th year. For the festival, Huldelpohl-Scoenling

Brewing Company releases its bock and dopplebock beers, and Cincinnatians enjoy a blessing of the kegs, a parade led by a sausage queen, lederhosen-clad fire eaters, bockwurst sausages, and lots of quaffing. Info: bockfest.com

9-11

YEONGDEOK SNOW CRAB FESTIVAL

Gangguhang Port, South Korea

Every March since the 10th century, crowds have flocked to this South Korean port for sweet, plump, spider-legged *yeongdeok daegae* (snow crabs) pulled from the East Sea at peak season. Half a million visitors attend the annual festival, where the coveted crabs are auctioned off to the public. Visitors can venture out on a snow crab fishing boat, enter the cooking competition, or sample dishes like snow crab soup and rice flavored with the crustacean's tomalley. Info: english.visitkorea.or.kr

11

URI ARTICHOKE FESTIVAL

Uri, Sardinia, Italy

Dozens of varieties of artichokes are cooked up at this event in northern Sardinia, where festivalgoers dine on the blowfish-shaped spinoso



Sardo, sliced and served raw with curls of local pecorino; the thornless Masedu, stuffed with ricotta and garlic and drizzled with lemon; and other kinds of the thorny bromeliad prepared in different, delicious ways. Races, local music, and folk arts round out the fun. Info: sardegna.italiaguidea.it/en

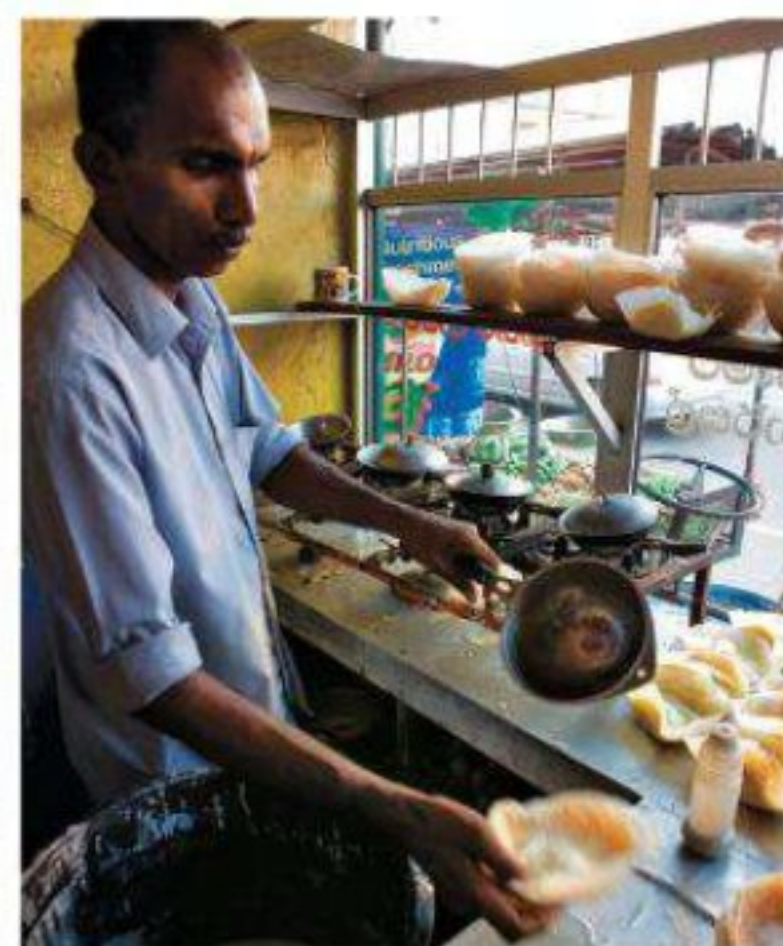
16

ARGUNGU FISHING AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Argungu, Nigeria

In 1934 Sultan Hasan dan Mu'azu Ahmedu, of the Nigerian city of Sokoto, visited rival town Argungu, where, as a symbol of truce, the local men competed to catch him the largest fish, creating a lasting peace between the two towns. Today, this event still features a hand-net fishing contest in the Mata Fada River. The winner is named Fisherman of the Year and is awarded cash, a car, and a trip to Mecca. While the »

economy has burgeoned, and the newly mobile society hungers for quick snacks. Hoppers have become a popular street food, sold by a "hopper man," who works behind blue-hot gas flames, ladling batter into his many round-bottomed, aluminum pans. He swirls one of the small, deep vessels until batter spills over the sides, forming lacy edges. Then he covers it to cook the pillowy portion that pools at its bottom. A quick clatter of the pans, and hoppers are



A vendor in Aluthgama, Sri Lanka, preparing an egg hopper.

stacked steaming in front of you. The scents of coconut and yeast fill the air.

In the United States, we don't have such stands, but we still get cravings. A typical serving is three to eight hoppers. To cook for a crowd, you need at least four pans—exactly how many we have. The problem is that "we" is a group of friends, Sri Lankans and their families living in Seattle; the pans are shared among us. Whenever we go to Sri Lanka, I ask my husband if we should get our own. "It's better to share," he says. "Besides, our suitcase is already full of spices."

He's right. When we want to make hoppers, we make calls: "Do you have the pans?" we ask. "Know who does?" Inevitably, we hear ourselves saying, "Oh, yes, come at eight. Don't bring anything." By the time we find the hopper pans, we've also found a party. —Beth Maxey

Hoppers

(Sri Lankan Crêpes with Onion

Sambol and Egg)

MAKES 16

Made using a batter similar to crêpes, Sri Lanka's crispy-edged rice flour hoppers (pictured on page 11) are formed into edible bowls and filled with toppings ranging from onion sambol to a simple steamed egg.

- 1 tbsp. dried Maldiv fish chips (see page 84) or coarsely chopped dried shrimp
- 3 dried chiles de arbol, stemmed
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1 tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 1 tsp. active dry yeast
- 3 cups rice flour
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 2½ cups coconut milk
- ¼ tsp. baking soda
- Canola oil, for pan
- Eggs (optional)

1 To make the onion sambol, purée dried fish, chiles, onion, lime juice, and salt, to taste, in a food processor until smooth; transfer to a bowl and refrigerate until ready to serve. To make the hoppers, combine yeast and 1¾ cups water heated to 115° in a bowl; let sit until foamy, 8–10 minutes. Combine 1 tsp. salt, flour, and sugar in a bowl; add yeast mixture and stir into a batter. Cover, and let rest for about 2 hours. Add coconut milk and baking soda; stir until smooth. Chill batter for 1 hour.

2 Heat a hopper pan (see page 84) or an 8" nonstick skillet over high heat and grease lightly with oil; add ⅓ cup batter, and immediately swirl batter around to cover inside surface. Cook until batter begins to set, about 1 minute. Cover, and cook until set and edges are crispy, about 2 minutes. (If you'd like to add an egg, crack it into the center of the crêpe before covering pan.) Remove hopper from the pan and repeat with the remaining batter. Serve hoppers with sambol.

5 to Try

Guiltless Luxury

Humanely raised high-end meats

1. Ayrshire Farm Rose Veal

(540/592-7018; ayrshirefarm.com) Certified humane Rose Veal—sold ground or in shanks, roasts, or chops—is named for the delicately flavored, pink-tinted flesh of calves that are bottle-fed and then pastured on this organic farm in Upperville, Virginia.

2. Full Circle Bison Ranch

(541/846-1351; fullcirclebisonranch.com) Full Circle bison spend their lives ranging and grazing on an organic ranch in Oregon's Williams Valley; the result is lean, juicy steaks, ribs, and roasts with a bold, herbaceous flavor.

3. Lone Mountain Wagyu

(866/567-9543; lonemountainwagyu.com) Unlike in Japan, where Wagyu cattle are raised in tight pens, these sumptuously marbled, meltingly tender cuts come from cattle that are pasture-raised by ranchers in Golden, New Mexico, who use alternative energy and protect ecosystem diversity.

4. Rare Hare Barn Heritage Rabbit

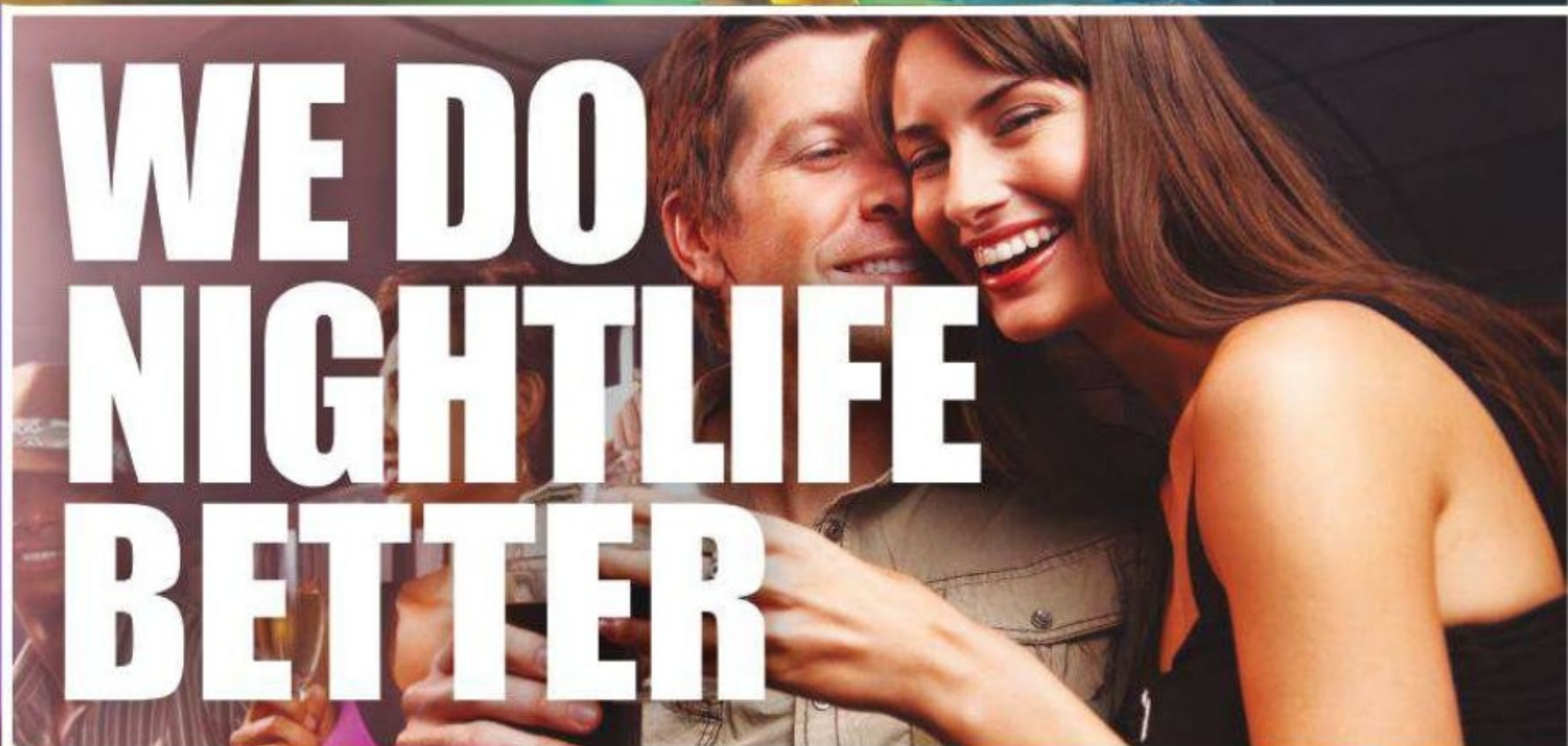
(316/259-4262; rareharebarn.com) A natural diet and humane care coax tender meat with a subtle gamey flavor from rabbits like the American Silver Fox at a Leon, Kansas, farm dedicated to conserving and preserving heritage breeds.

5. Schiltz Late Harvest Goose Liver #1

(877/872-4458; roastgoose.com) The folks at this farm in Sisseton, South Dakota, never force-feed their free-range geese. Instead, the birds naturally plump up for cold weather, producing a creamy, luscious liver that's nearly identical to foie gras but is harvested humanely. —Felicia Campbell



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» prized fish is usually a 100-pound-plus Nile perch, smaller herring, lutefish, and tilapia are barbecued at the event, which also includes animal skinning and duck hunting contests. Info: cometonigeria.com

17-18

SAGRA DELLE FRITTELLE

Montefioralle, Italy

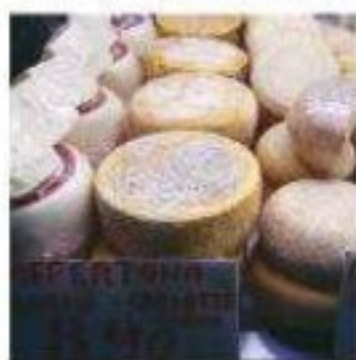
The Catholic feast of St. Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary, wraps up with an abundance of *frittelle di riso*, sweet flour fritters. Since 1969, this small Tuscan village has held an event in which locals fry the crispy treats—made of rice boiled in milk with sugar, eggs, orange zest, and the sweet herbal liqueur Strega—in a six-foot-wide community cauldron that dates to the Renaissance. The fritters are served hot with glasses of *vin santo* dessert wine. Info: montefioralle.info

23-25

CALIFORNIA'S ARTISAN CHEESE FESTIVAL

Petaluma, California

Local cheese lovers descend on



Petaluma to visit creameries and farms, develop their cheese-making skills with classes in mozzarella-stretching and the

like, and browse the marketplace where vendors like Sonoma's tiny Bohemian Creamery peddle their wares. Info: artisancheesefestival.com

24-25

TEXAS ONION FEST

Weslaco, Texas

The southern Texas town of Weslaco throws an annual party honoring the Texas 1015 onion. Named for its ideal planting date in mid-October, the 1015—developed by Texas A&M's Dr. Leonard Pike in 1983—is revered as one of the world's sweetest onions. At the festival, it's deep-fried, blackened on the grill, and scarfed down raw in an onion-eating contest, before starring in a recipe competition. Info: weslaco.com

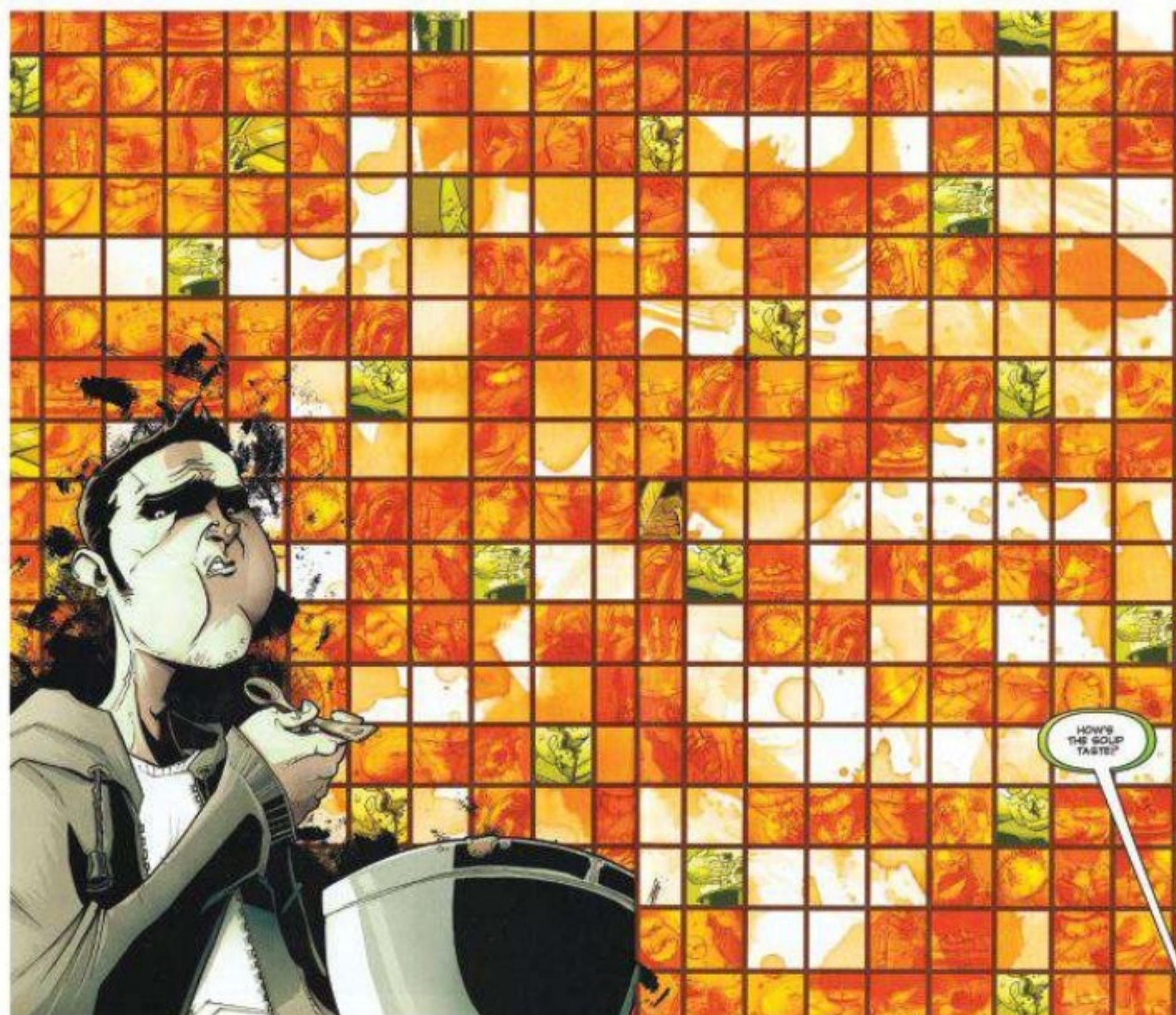
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Birthday

NORMAN ERNEST BORLAUG

1914, Saude, Iowa

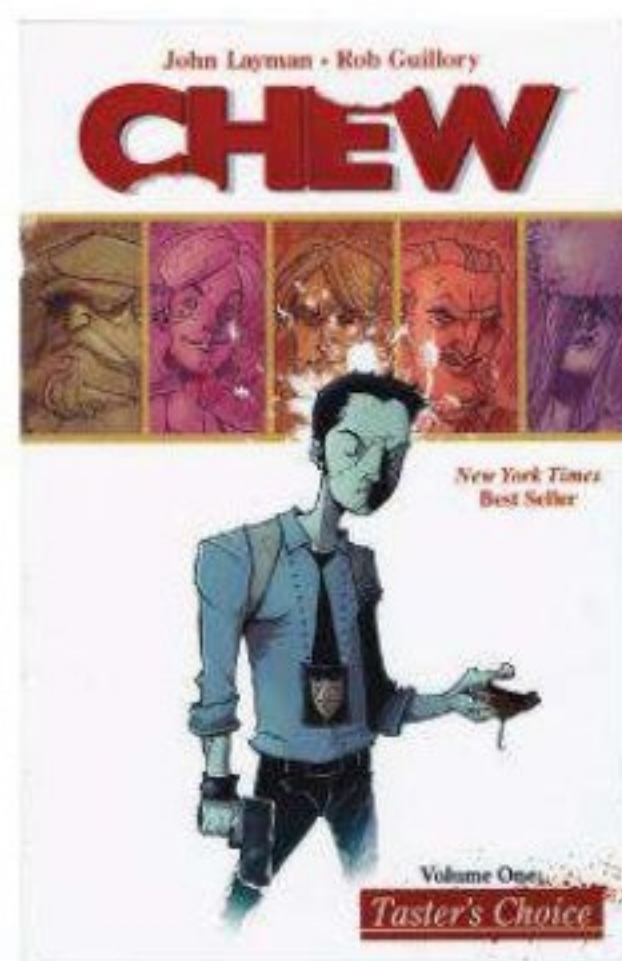
A former Iowa farmboy, Norman Borlaug joined the Rockefeller Foundation's Cooperative Mexican Agriculture Project in 1944, where he developed the high-yielding, disease-resistant wheat that earned him the title "the father of the Green Revolution." He later worked in India and Pakistan, where he helped to reverse food shortages. Borlaug, who died in 2009, received the Nobel Peace Prize, a Presidential Medal of Freedom, and a Congressional Gold Medal for his pioneering work.



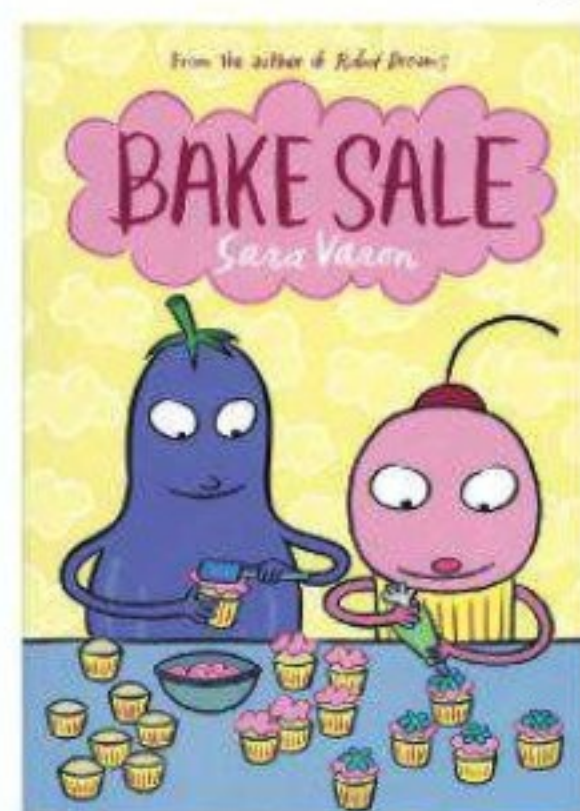
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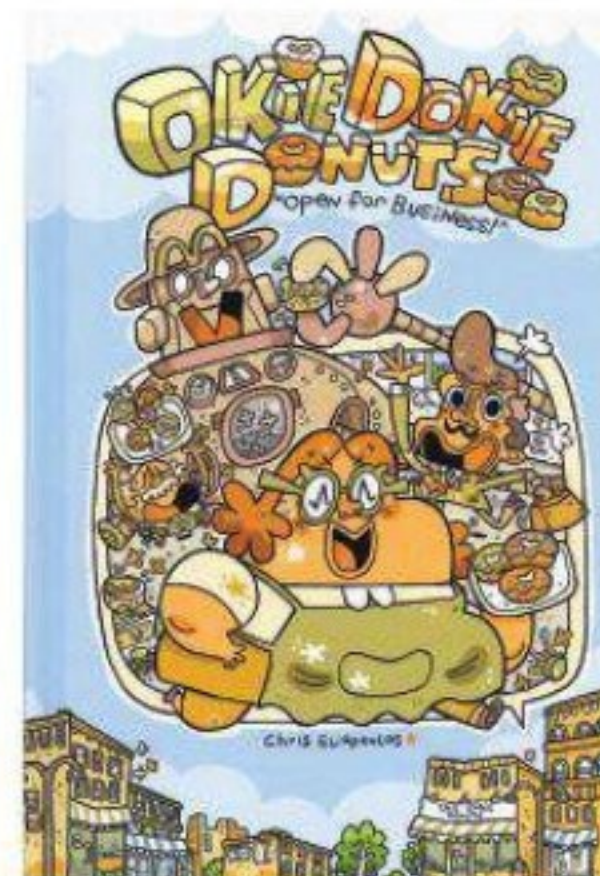
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3



4



5

Hungry Heroes

Superheroes do many things: They leap tall buildings in a single bound, they save the universe. But they rarely, in comics, stop for a snack. It's a sign of gastronomy's growing importance in our culture, then, that culinary comics have surged in recent years beyond the Dagwood sandwich. For comic book fans like me, the genre delivers lessons on dining and cooking in a wildly entertaining format. *Chew* 3, written by John Layman and illustrated by Rob Guillory (Image Comics), stars the mystery-solving Tony Chu 1, who picks up psychic vibes from food. In his world, poultry is illegal and chefs will stop at nothing to bring back the taste of chicken.

The vibrantly drawn allegory is an American version of a *gourmet manga*, Japan's genre of food comics, many of which involve action heroes. *Oishinbo* 2 (VIZ Media), a 29-year-old *gourmet manga* with over 100 million copies in print, chronicles a food journalist's quest to produce the ultimate meal. Through our hero's nail-biting adventures, fans get lessons in Japanese cuisine. But it's not all Sturm und Drang in the food-cartoon world. Author Sara Varon takes a sweeter approach in *Bake Sale* (First Second, 2011) 4, a graphic novel about a bakery-owning cupcake. It's not only cute, it's a cookbook, with recipes for treats like peppermint brownies and, of course, cupcakes. Chris Eliopoulos's *Okie Dokie Donuts* (Top Shelf Productions, 2011) 5 is the fable of donut store owner Big Mama and her run-in with a robotic donut maker. Its happy ending reflects our national interest in artisanal foods: "Good food takes time and consideration," Big Mama declares. "I'll make my donuts by hand, now and forever." —Helen Rosner

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 Erin Haslag:
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SWEET POTATO
Crispy Bite-Sized Puffs



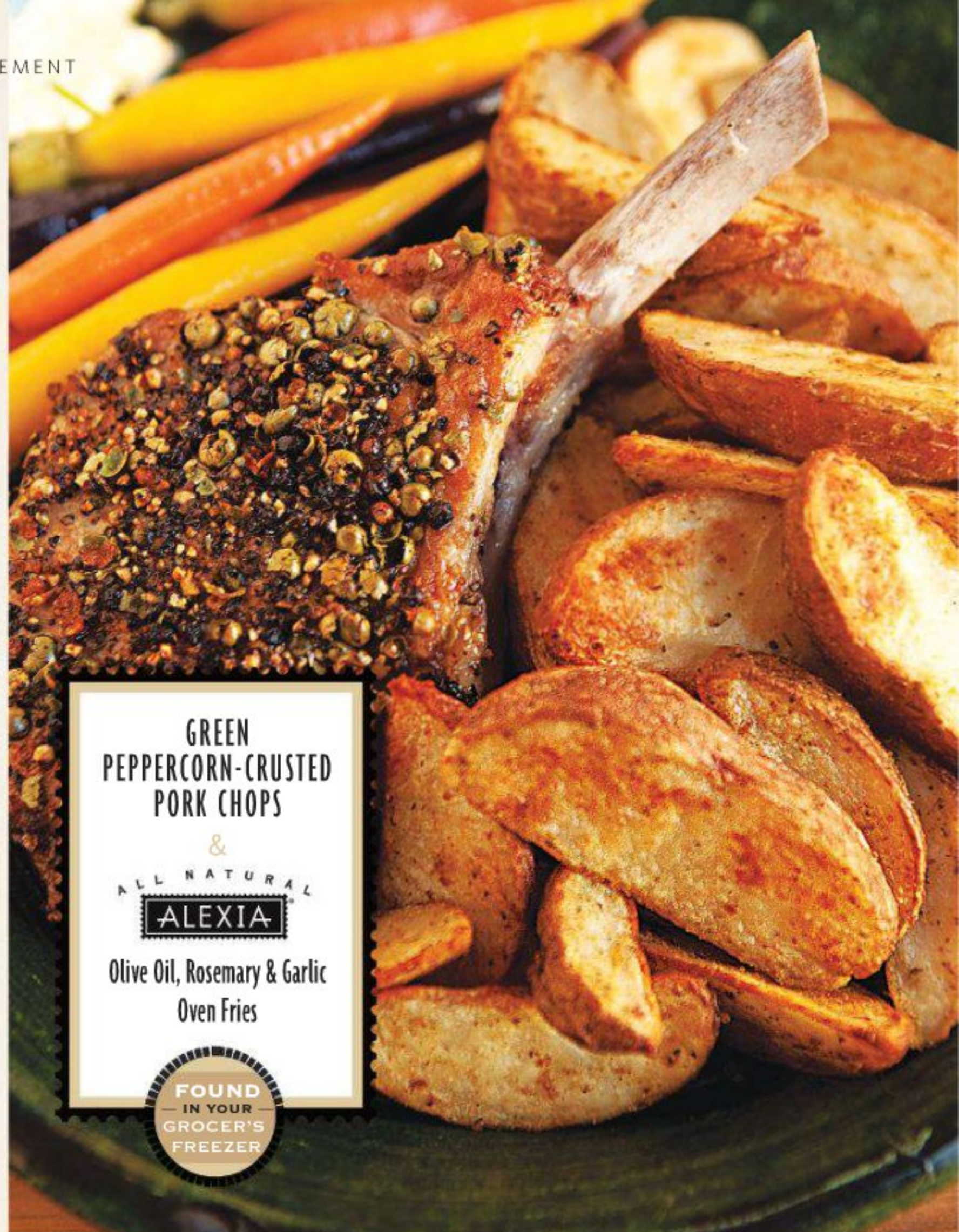
TERIYAKI-GLAZED
SKIRT STEAK

&
ALL NATURAL

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Onion Rings

FOUND
IN YOUR
GROCER'S
FREEZER



GREEN
PEPPERCORN-CRUSTED
PORK CHOPS

&
ALL NATURAL

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Olive Oil, Rosemary & Garlic
Oven Fries

FOUND
IN YOUR
GROCER'S
FREEZER



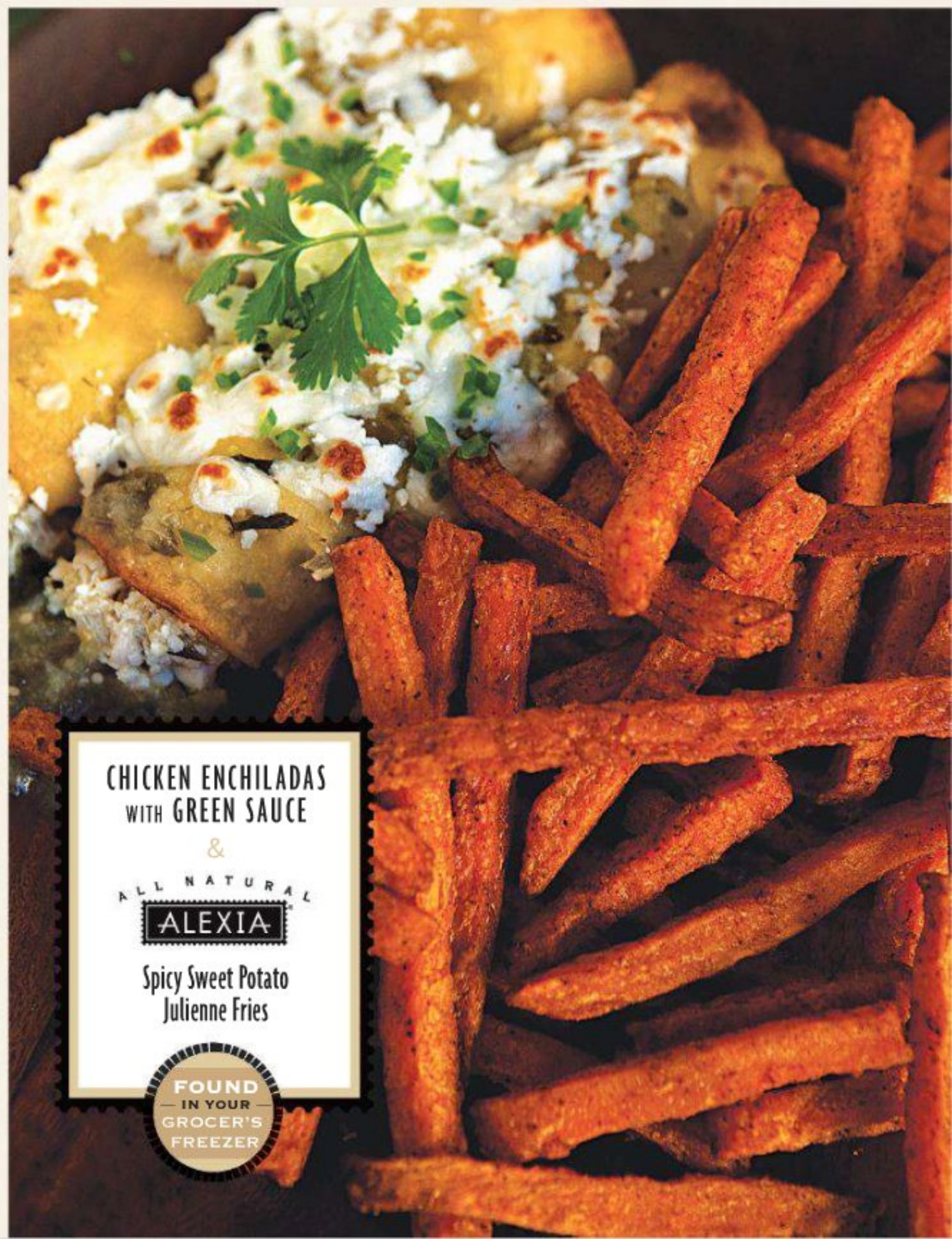
NEW ORLEANS-STYLE
SHRIMP PO'BOYS

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Waffle Fries

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CHICKEN ENCHILADAS
WITH GREEN SAUCE

&
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ALEXIA

Spicy Sweet Potato
Julienne Fries

FOUND
IN YOUR
GROCER'S
FREEZER

GREEN PEPPERCORN-CRUSTED PORK CHOPS

SERVES 4

- 4 10-oz. bone-in pork chops, bones cleaned
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 2 tbsp. black peppercorns, crushed
- 2 tbsp. green peppercorns, crushed
- 1 tbsp. canola oil

PAIRS WITH
ALL NATURAL
ALEXIA
OLIVE OIL, ROSEMARY &
GARLIC OVEN FRIES®



1. Season the chops with salt to taste. Press the peppercorns into the chops on both sides. Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat.
2. Add the chops and cook until done on both sides, about 4 minutes per side.
3. Set aside to rest for 5 minutes. Serve with Alexia Olive Oil, Rosemary and Garlic Oven Fries®.

TERIYAKI-GLAZED SKIRT STEAK

SERVES 4

- 7 tbsp. sake
- 7 tbsp. mirin
- 7 tbsp. dark soy sauce
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 3 1-lb. skirt steaks, each trimmed and halved crosswise
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

PAIRS WITH
ALL NATURAL
ALEXIA
ONION RINGS®



1. Bring sake, mirin, soy sauce, and sugar to a boil in a small saucepan over medium heat; cook until sugar dissolves, stirring constantly. Let cool.
2. Prepare a hot charcoal grill, and season steaks with salt and pepper. Grill steaks, brushing with teriyaki glaze every minute or so, for about 2 minutes per side for medium rare for thinner steaks and about 3 minutes per side for thicker ones. Brush with more teriyaki glaze.
3. Let steaks rest for 5 minutes. Serve with Alexia Panko Breaded Onion Rings®.

CHICKEN ENCHILADAS WITH GREEN SAUCE

SERVES 4

- 8 oz. fresh tomatillos, husks removed, rinsed, and quartered
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 4 fresh serrano chiles, stemmed and chopped
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 2 tbsp. minced white onion
- 2 tbsp. roughly chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ cup plus 1 tbsp. canola oil
- 2 cups queso añejo, grated, plus more to garnish
- ½ small yellow onion, minced
- Canola oil, for frying
- 12 corn tortillas

PAIRS WITH
ALL NATURAL
ALEXIA
SPICY SWEET POTATO
JULIENNE FRIES®



1. Make the green sauce: Puree tomatillos, garlic, chiles, salt, and 1 ½ cups water in a blender. Heat 1 tbsp. oil in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat, and add sauce; cook, stirring often, until reduced and thickened, about 10 minutes. Season with salt, onions, and cilantro and set aside.
2. To assemble the enchiladas, combine the queso añejo and yellow onion in a small bowl and set aside. Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. Dutch oven and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Using tongs, grasp all the tortillas in a stack and submerge in oil, swirling in oil until slightly fried and pliable, about 15 seconds. Remove from oil and set aside on a plate to cool.
3. Dip each tortilla in sauce until completely coated. Transfer to a plate and top with 3 tbsp. cheese filling; roll up like a cigar and sprinkle with more cheese. Serve with Alexia Spicy Sweet Potato Julienne Fries®.

NEW ORLEANS-STYLE SHRIMP PO'BOYS

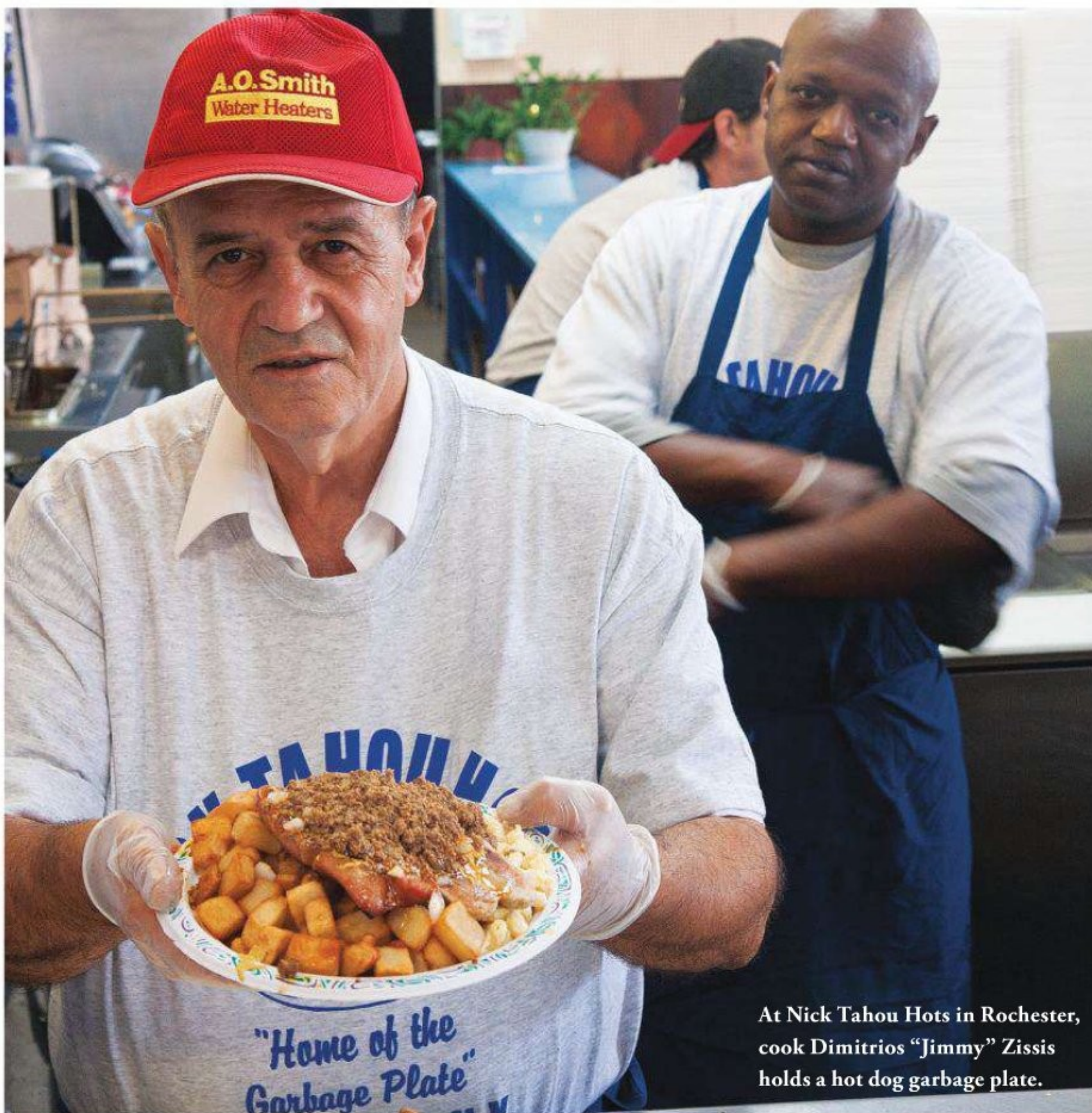
SERVES 4

- Canola oil, for frying
- 2 cups yellow cornmeal
- ½ cup flour
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ tsp. cayenne
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 40 small shrimp, peeled and deveined
- ½ cup mayonnaise

PAIRS WITH
ALL NATURAL
ALEXIA
WAFFLE FRIES®



- 1 loaf (about 20" long) soft French or Italian bread, halved lengthwise, then crosswise, lightly toasted
 - 16 slices dill pickle
 - 1 ripe tomato, cored and sliced
 - ½ head iceberg lettuce, shredded
1. Pour oil into a heavy medium pot to a depth of 2" and heat over medium heat until temperature registers 350° on a deep-fry thermometer.
 2. Meanwhile, combine cornmeal, flour, garlic powder, black pepper, cayenne, and salt to taste in a wide dish. Working in small batches, dredge shrimp in flour mixture, shaking off excess, then deep-fry in the hot oil until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Transfer shrimp to a wire rack to let drain briefly.
 3. To assemble, spread mayonnaise on cut length of bread, then put half the pickles, shrimp, tomatoes, and lettuce, in that order, on each bottom half. Place top halves of bread atop lettuce. Serve with Alexia Waffle Fries with Seasoned Salt®.

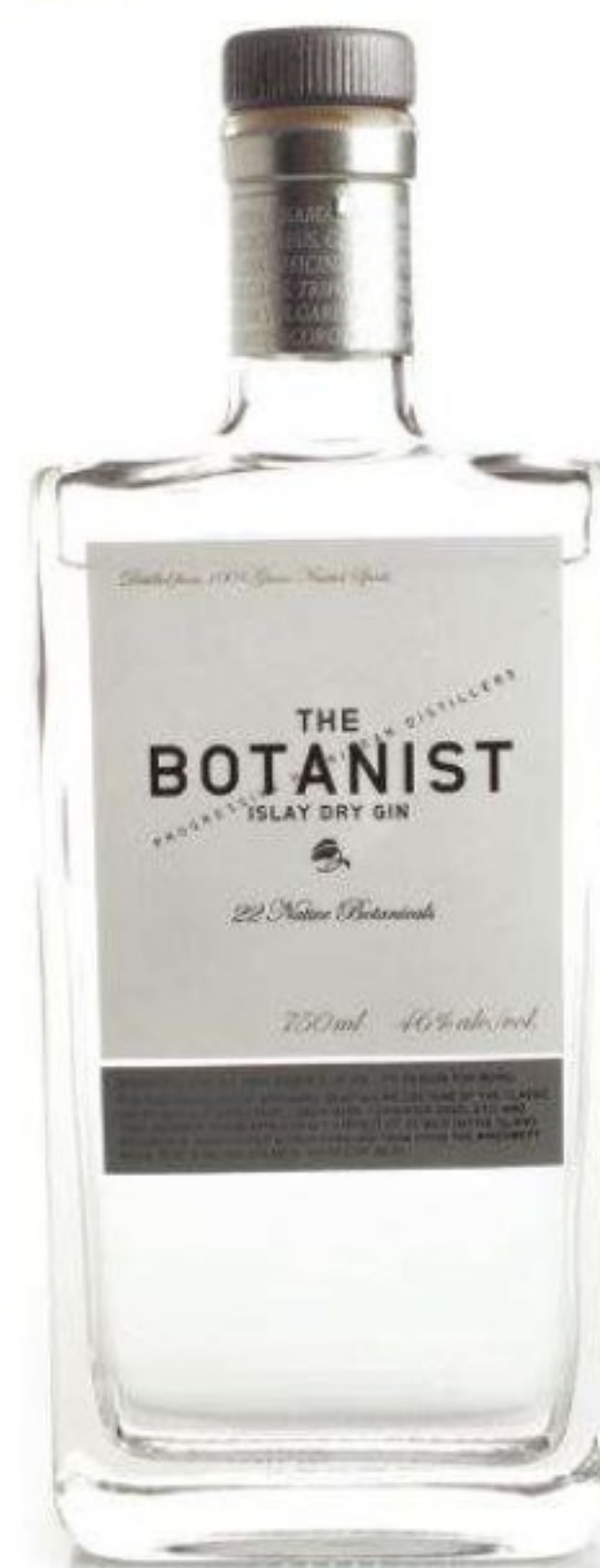


At Nick Tahou Hots in Rochester, cook Dimitrios “Jimmy” Zissis holds a hot dog garbage plate.

One Good Bottle

A Clear Standout

I have always been a fan of the smoky, malty whiskies of Islay, the Scottish island known for its artisanal single-malt scotches. So I was excited in 2001 when the formerly shuttered, 130-year-old Bruichladdich distillery was revived. But it was really a surprise when, recently, Bruichladdich turned out a small-batch gin. **The Botanist Islay Dry Gin (\$38)**, the island’s first such spirit, is infused with a pot-pourri of 31 botanicals, 22 of which grow wild on Islay. The spirit simmers slowly in a pot still, so that its vapors mingle for a good, long time with all those botanicals, taking on aromas of juniper and allspice, with dark, leafy, and pleasingly bitter herbal flavors. At 92 proof, the alcohol is noticeable, but a sweet note emerges as well. The gin’s spicy and herbal subtleties really shine in straightforward cocktails like a classic Tom Collins or a very dry martini. —William H. Loob



Glorious Mess

In Rochester, garbage is considered a delicacy

SOME YEARS AGO, I got a job at a bar in my hometown of Rochester, New York. After work, I would hit a diner called Mark’s Texas Hots for a cheeseburger, fries, and macaroni salad, all swimming in a chili-like “hot sauce.” Though I didn’t realize it then, I was eating a garbage plate.

Originally called hots and potatoes and subject to umpteen variations, the garbage plate is a dish stacked with short-order proteins (franks or hamburgers, fried ham or haddock, eggs), piled with two of three sides (french or

home fries, macaroni salad, baked beans), and doused in mustard, ketchup, onions, and mild hot sauce. It is native to Rochester, a city of big appetites and working-class budgets.

The Garbage Plate originated at Nick Tahou Hots, a downtown lunch spot opened in 1918 by Alex Tahou, a Greek immigrant, who named it after his son. During the Depression, Tahou devised his hots and potatoes, with cured “red hot” franks and uncured “white hots,” as a low-cost belly filler. By the 1980s, college kids were asking for “a plate with all that garbage,” and the phrase stuck. Says Tahou’s grandson and current owner, Alex, Jr., “We tried to fight it. ‘Don’t say that; it doesn’t sound good when you call it garbage.’ But when the powers that

be are stronger than our desires, who are we going to please, customers or ourselves?”

Since then, the garbage plate has embedded itself in Rochester’s DNA. The trademark resides with Nick Tahou Hots, so elsewhere it’s trash plate, sloppy plate, messy plate. But no matter the name, its lifeblood is the hot sauce, a greasy condiment riddled with meaty griddle scrapings and spiced with paprika and cinnamon. Though the spices are prevalent in Greek cooking, Tahou insists that the hot sauce came from a Mexican man who Alex, Sr. befriended. “My grandfather gave him a place to sleep and food,” and the man gave him the recipe. Such a return on kindness is the stuff of which, in Rochester, legends are made. —Brent Cox



Sweeter Than Sugar

Tea time in Japan brings a visual feast

I first saw *higashi* in a Tokyo food hall, and I was blown away by these individually tinted sugar and rice-flour confections: exquisitely wrought birds and flowers, representations of water and mountains, tiny turtles and temple tableaux. Popular hostess gifts, they're an integral part of the Japanese tea ceremony, meant to be eaten, not in tea, but alongside it, to offset the bitterness of the drink. Though the ceremony dates back to the 15th century, *higashi* came later. In 18th-century Japan, the sugar treats were a luxury enjoyed by the imperial family and the upper classes, made in shapes that celebrated the seasons. Still today, just before spring bloom, you might serve *higashi* shaped as cherry buds. A week or so later, your *higashi* could resemble blossoms. Though the confections are rarely found outside Japan, the American company *Chambre de Sucre* imports Japanese sugars as delicately made as *higashi*. Pink and white mini flowers, dark-brown sugar balls, chunky amber and rainbow crystals, and ornamented orbs and cubes, they're made by a 268-year-old company that has been hand-making the sugars since the early 1800s. They're perfect for a tea party or to drop ceremoniously into champagne cocktails. —Seánan Forbes

TODD COLEMAN

On the Web

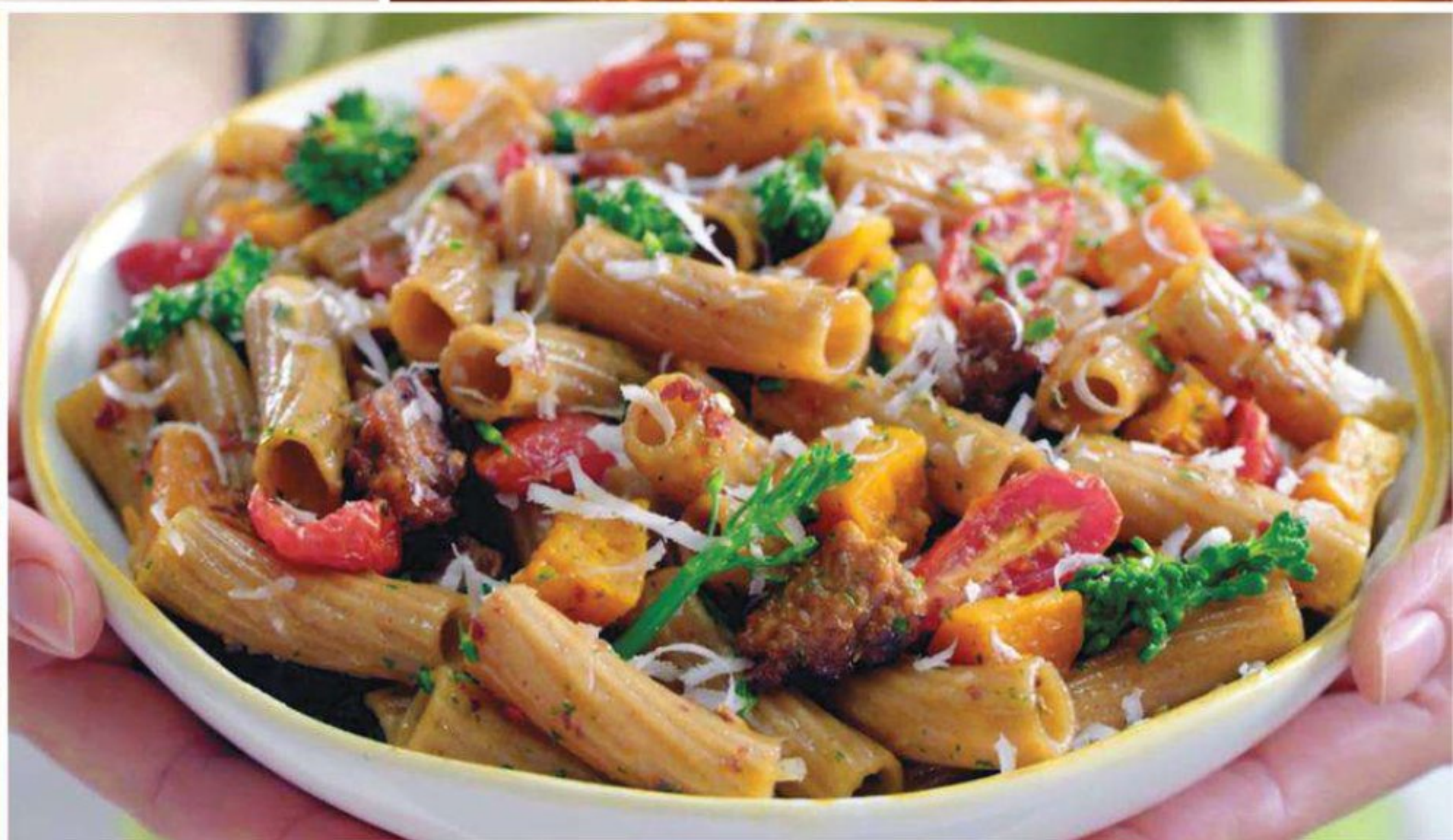
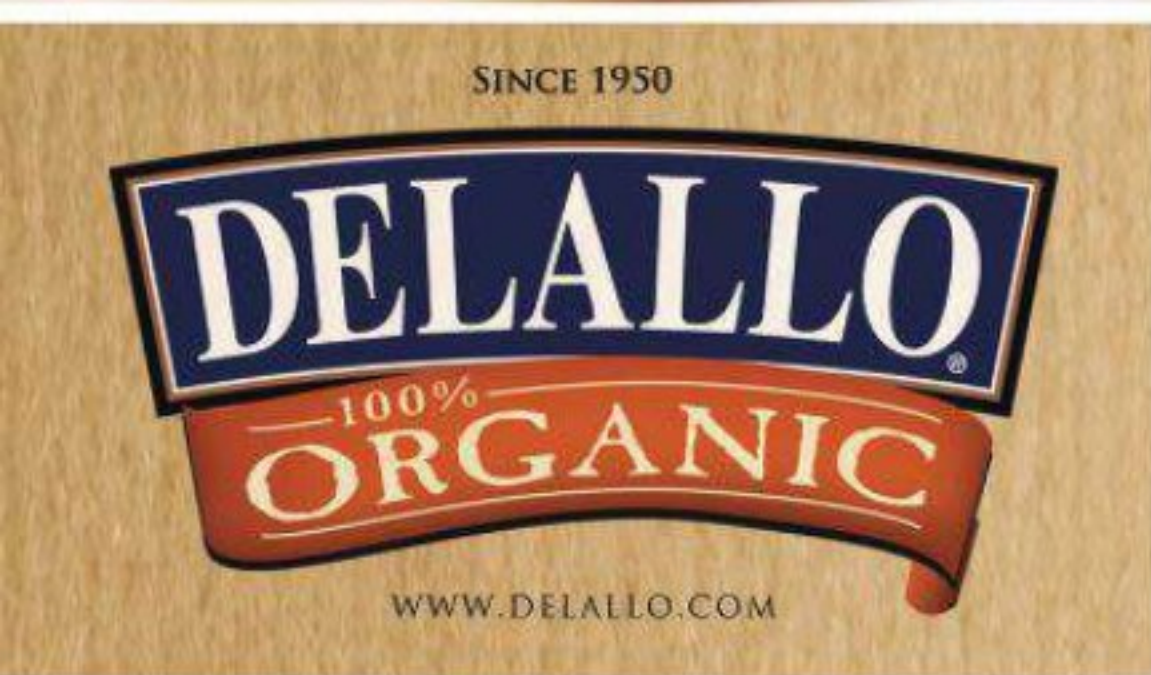
Election Season

The online writers who turn their attention toward the kitchen are culinary ambassadors, historians, memoirists, scientists, and anthropologists—often all at once—and nearly every day, we find a new site that inspires us with its curiosity and creativity, and helps us eat more knowledgeably and cook more skillfully. At saveur.com, with the help of our readers, we celebrate culinary content on the web with our annual Best Food Blog Awards, lauding the sites that have taught us and moved us. From among the thousands of blogs nominated last year, reader-selected winners included *Smitten Kitchen*, which landed the title of Best Cooking Blog thanks to writer Deb Perelman's personality-driven take on simple, sophisticated cookery, and Best Regional Cuisine Blog winner *Homesick Texan*, which proves that you can make soulfully authentic Texas



cuisine even if you're stranded in the wilds of New York City. It's time now for the **2012 Best Food Blog Awards**. Starting March 6, send us your nominations for the sites and stories that you think are the most outstanding in 16 categories that run the gamut from baking to cocktails to travel to celebrity cooks; beginning on April 5, come back to vote for the winners. Nominate, vote, and find out more about the Best Food Blog Awards at saveur.com/blogawards.

THE PANTRY, page 84: Info on purchasing *The Botanist Gin* and Japanese sugars, visiting Nick Tahou Hots, and more.



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REVIEW

Spice of Life

Chef Ana Sortun's Levant-inspired cuisine is as surprising as ever

BY CORBY KUMMER PHOTOGRAPHS BY PENNY DE LOS SANTOS

WHEN CHEF ANA Sortun opened Oleana 11 years ago in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the restaurant—with its filigree lanterns, Turkish rugs, and sultry garden where musicians played the oud and hand drums—was a novelty. The food, an amalgam of Mediterranean cuisines that wandered all over North Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East, had hardly any precedent in Cambridge, or this country. I remember being surprised on an early visit by the startlingly vivid flavors: There were colorful mezes like *kibbeh nayeh*, a pescatarian take on traditionally meaty kibbeh, with tender raw tuna, smoked bulgur, and Turkish peppers, as well as other dishes, like fried mussels and hot peppers with a garlicky *tarator* sauce, and succulent, tamarind-glazed short ribs with smoky eggplant purée. I'd never tasted anything quite like it.

A decade later, Oleana has become not only a beloved Cambridge staple but a force in the restaurant world. Last fall, after I dined at a new African-Turkish-Italian place in Portland, Oregon, the young chef told me the restaurant he most wanted his to be like was Oleana. It got me thinking about how the flavors and foods that Sortun, now 44 years old, has championed over the years—saffron and sumac, cumin and pomegranate—have become so much more common in our culinary vernacular. And it made me want to revisit Oleana, as well as Sofra, its newer sister café, to see if they stood the test of time.

At Oleana, I ordered a dish I've enjoyed before: Sortun's Arabic interpretation of *fideos*, a Spanish specialty, which she makes by toasting broken vermicelli, then simmering it in a broth infused with saffron, vanilla, fennel, coriander, chiles, and cocoa. This is my kind of comfort food, tossed with chickpeas and Swiss chard and napped in a citrusy aioli. It's as wonderful now as the first time I

ate it. Chickpea terrine stuffed with apricots, golden raisins, and pistachios, topped with a tahini sauce fragrant with Aleppo chile, cinnamon, and cumin, is an elegant canvas for Sortun's arsenal of spice.

I don't think Sortun's cooking was always this bold. When Oleana first opened, the chef was somewhat slavish in her re-creation of the dishes she picked up on her travels in and around Turkey. (She also learned North African cooking under Moncef Meddeb, the Tunisian-born chef who founded L'Espalier in Boston, and about Middle Eastern cuisine under the mentorship of Sari Abul-Jubein, the Syrian-born owner of Casablanca in Harvard Square.) I remember her Turkish spice-rubbed lamb steak with fava bean moussaka, a version of a dish she learned from a Turkish home cook. It was delicious, but it didn't bear her mark. Now she lets herself experiment and allows her own palate to roam more freely. In her current iteration of moussaka, for example, made with a light yogurt-enriched mornay sauce and thick fava bean purée, the lamb has been reduced to a supporting role, ground and used as a savory accent.

From the start, Sortun married those Levantine flavors and dishes to local produce, before that was *de rigueur*. She went so far as to marry the farmer who grew her best stuff, Chris Kurth, who now runs Siena Farm, named for the couple's young daughter. These days, Sortun seems content to let the produce dictate the menu. I found this to be the case during recent visits to Sofra, her café in Cambridge, where the seasonal mezes, an array of bright salads and vegetables, are irresistible. I love the piquant beet tzatziki, sweet Moroccan carrot salad, and romano beans stewed in *plaki*, a sweet-tart tomato-onion sauce made with red, green, and pickled Hungarian hot wax peppers. The sandwiches, too, are showstoppers, street food brought indoors: Homemade breads like *yufka*, a nutty flatbread, are made on a *saj* (a drum-shaped griddle that was pro-

duced for Sofra in Lebanon) and fashioned into heavenly shawarma filled with slices of grilled lamb, pickled cabbage, and tahini.

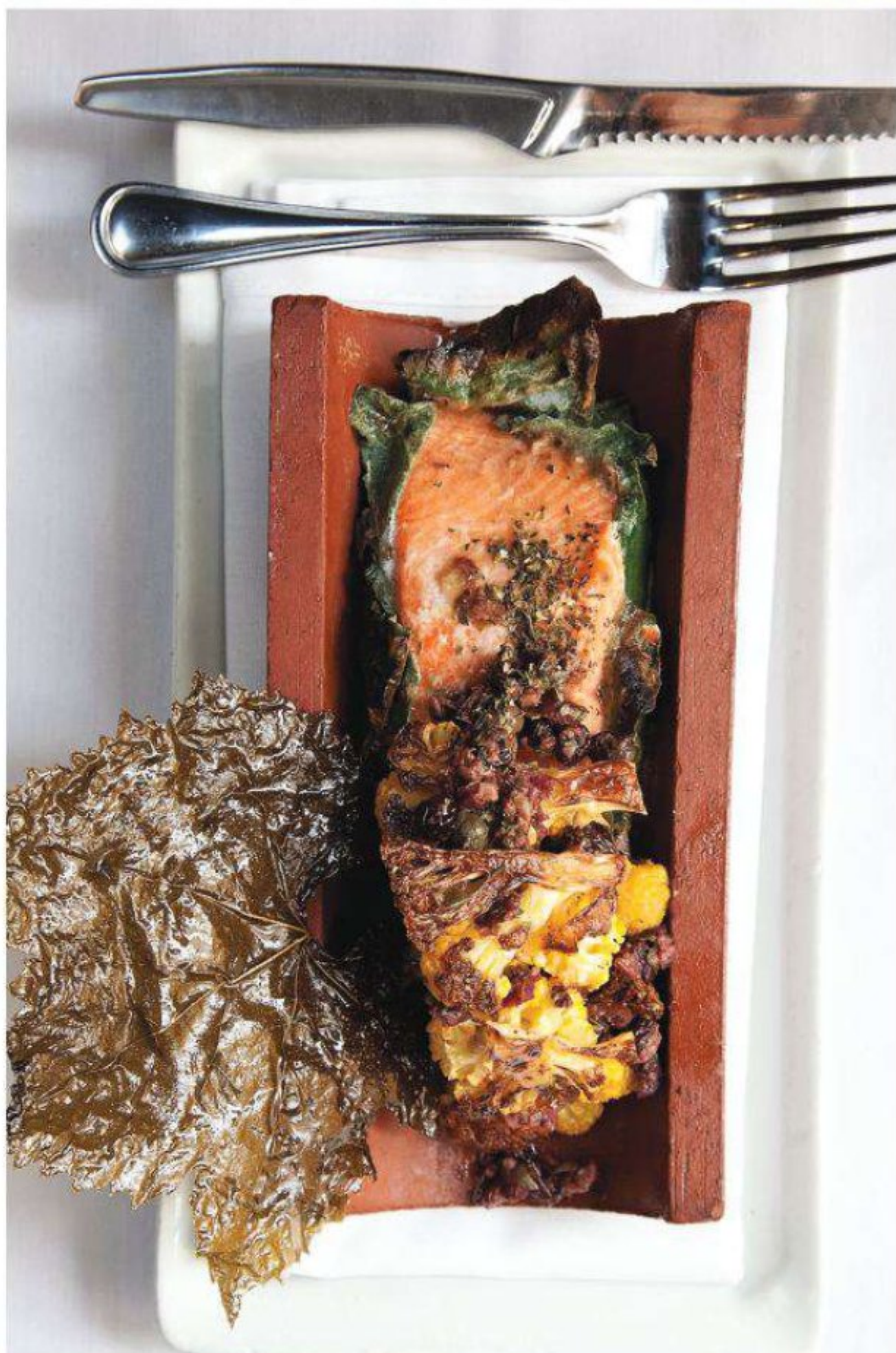
Sortun opened Sofra in 2008 with her longtime pastry chef, Maura Kilpatrick, and partner Gary Griffin, who has been working with Sortun from the beginning. The room is spare but welcoming, with a few low tables as in a Moroccan coffeehouse. There are unusual drinks like *salep*, steamed milk flavored with cinnamon and ground orchid root, and home-style Middle Eastern dishes like *shakshuka*, eggs poached in tomato sauce and spiked with *zhoug*, a hot chile relish.

And then there are Kilpatrick's pastries, superb renditions of American classics such as superior chocolate chip cookies with huge cubes of Scharffen Berger chocolate and an incredible variety of Middle Eastern-inspired sweets, like crumbly tahini shortbread; slices of *knafeh* (milk pudding sandwiched between layers of shredded wheat pastry); and, of course, baklava, in a version with chocolate and hazelnuts that has spoiled me for any other.

As at Oleana, the food at Sofra is as painstakingly executed as ever, but there's still the sense of fun and surprise that has defined both restaurants since they opened. No dish illustrates this better than Oleana's over-the-top baked Alaska, a mountain of meringue on a chewy macaroon base, with coconut ice cream and passion-fruit caramel, which has been on the menu since day one. No matter how often I order the dessert, it always feels celebratory, like every time I eat at Oleana and Sofra. 🍴

OLEANA 134 Hampshire Street, Cambridge (617/661-0505; oleanarestaurant.com). Hours: Sunday–Thursday 5:30–10 P.M.; Friday–Saturday 5:30–11 P.M. Entrées: \$24–\$32. Desserts: \$11–\$14. SOFRA 1 Belmont Street, Cambridge (617/661-3161; sofrabakery.com). Hours: Monday–Friday 8 A.M.–7 P.M.; Saturday–Sunday 8 A.M.–6 P.M. Plates: \$3–\$9. Pastry: \$1–\$4.50

CORBY KUMMER is the restaurant critic for Boston Magazine. His most recent story for *SAVEUR* was "Sportello" (April 2009).



Clockwise from top left: From top, black-eyed pea salad, sweet Moroccan carrot salad, beet tzatziki, and red pepper and walnut purée at Sofra; baked Alaska at Oleana; grape leaf–wrapped salmon with verjus butter, currants, Greek olives, and crispy cauliflower at Oleana; patrons at Sofra.

ROUTES

Surf and Turf

Virginia's Eastern Shore offers a bounty of regional specialties from land and sea

BY JANE AND MICHAEL STERN

SOME 30 YEARS AGO, while roadfooding south along Highway 13 in Virginia between the Pocomoke Sound and the Atlantic Ocean—or, more significantly, between Chesapeake Bay jumbo lump crab cakes and Norfolk sautéed-in-butter crabmeat—we came across a motel restaurant called the Owl that claimed to have invented french-fried sweet potatoes. We didn't pay much attention to the potatoes because the Owl served so many other distinct and delicious regional specialties from this southern part of the Delmarva Peninsula (named for Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia), including pan-fried chicken with spoon bread, briny Chincoteague oys-

ters, and dry-cured country ham. More recent trips opened our eyes to the fact that sweet potatoes are indeed something special along Virginia's bountiful Eastern Shore, where farmers still grow and sell such heirloom varieties as the ivory-hued, thin-skinned Hayman and the creamy, extra sweet Puerto Rican Red. The Owl is now long gone and french-fried sweet potatoes are these days common everywhere, but the breeze-swept peninsula from the Maryland state line down to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, through such remote and strangely named places as Little Hell, Mutton Hunk, Ticktown, and Nassawadox, remains a wonderland of culinary arcana.

We had no idea, for instance, that peninsulites make a big deal of the difference between seaside oysters and bayside oysters, the latter being fairly bland but good for frying, the former bold and marshy and delicious on the half shell (like those Chincoteagues). Metompkin Seafood, between Temperanceville and Modest Town, does not serve them raw because proprietors J.C. and Ellen Hudgins can't abide the health department red tape involved, but

SAVEUR contributing editors JANE and MICHAEL STERN are the authors of *roadfood.com* and *The Lexicon of Real American Food* (Lyons Press, 2011).



Tables at Sting-Ray's in Cape Charles, Virginia.

LONDON NORDEMAN

their ramshackle roadside market and seafood shack offers steamed oysters (and clams, shrimp, and scallops) that are unimpeachable.

Other highlights of the handwritten menu posted above Metompkin's counter include softshell crabs (when in season between May and September), fried-fish sandwiches, and Ellen's flaky blue-crab cakes. While you wait for J.C. to cook your order and Ellen to bring you your Styrofoam clamshell of food, you can wait in the one-room commissary, decorated with fishing equipment from J.C.'s days as a waterman, and peruse ice beds arrayed with flounder, catfish, shrimp, scallops, and clams, or shelves of hot sauce and fish-fry mix.

The whole affair is a true mom-and-pop operation, about which J.C. explains, "We own it, we take care of it, and we don't have to pay each other, so business is fine." In fact, prices are ridiculously low: \$3.95 for a bounteous flounder sandwich; \$11.95 for a half-pound of fried shrimp with fries, coleslaw, and hush puppies. Dining is outside, at picnic tables or on the hood of your car.

Driving farther south on Route 13, look for Becca's, a house on the left marked with a sign that says SMITH ISLAND CAKES. Smith Island, one of two inhabited islands in the Chesapeake

Bay, is actually part of Maryland, and its amazing cake—which comes in different flavors and is composed of eight to ten wafer-thin, well-frosted layers—was anointed the state's official dessert in 2008. But Rebecca Crutchley grew up on Tangier Island, the other inhabited one, which belongs to Virginia, and ate the cakes all her life. (Although a recipe for Smith Island cake didn't appear in print until the 1980s, the stack-cake tradition has its roots in the tortes Welsh settlers baked in the 17th century.)

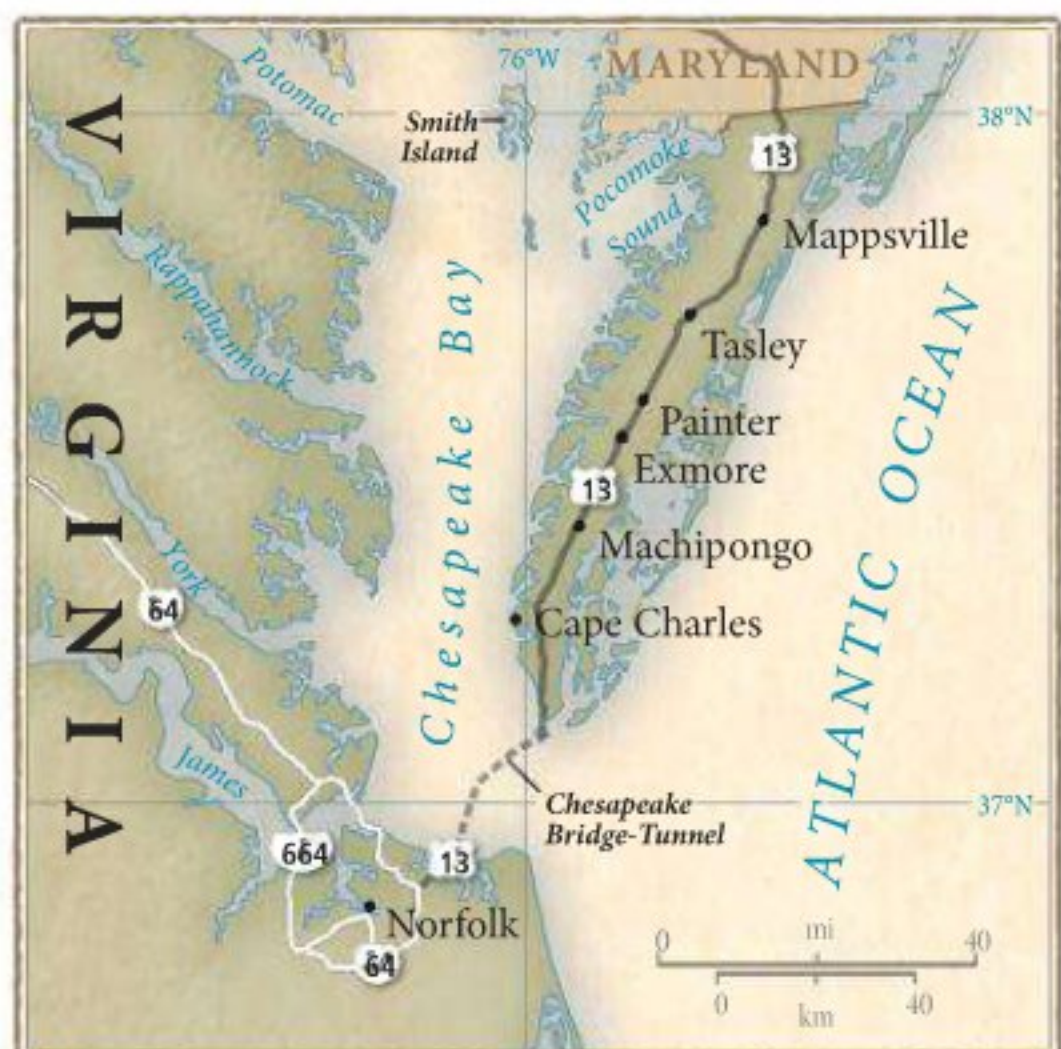
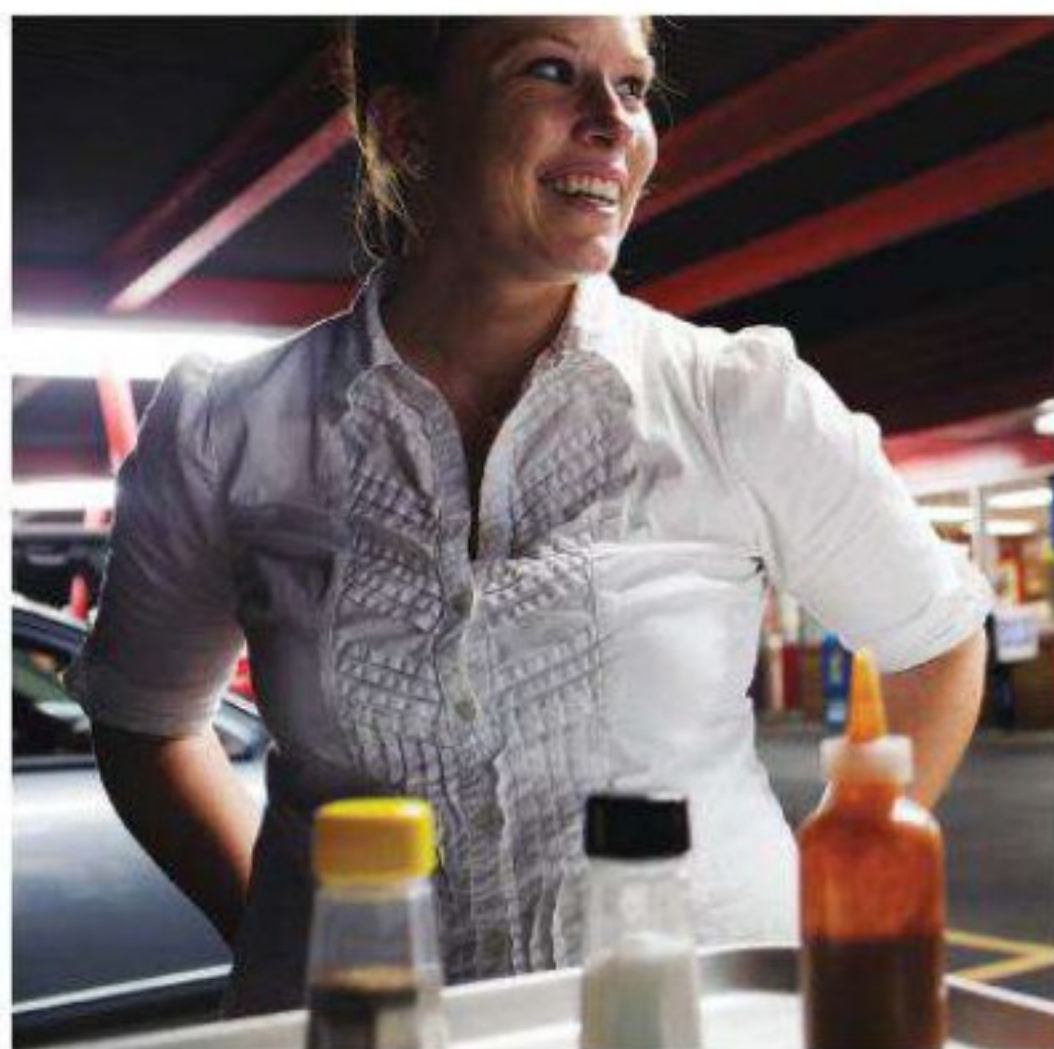
"People tell me I should call it a Tangier Cake," Becca jokes, confiding that the key to her version is baking individual layers rather than slicing thick ones. Yellow butter cakes get fudge icing, white cakes come with cream cheese icing, and other flavors include chocolate-cherry, banana-caramel, peanut butter, and red velvet. In addition to selling cakes to go, Becca's has two cozy dining rooms and a menu that features the likes of crab melt "the Tangier way," meaning local lump crabmeat topped with warm havarti cheese on a toasted croissant, and cream of crab soup sided by sweet potato biscuits.

An unluckily named but tasty specialty found along the Eastern Shore is known as swelling toads, which are tiny blowfish (not

poisonous) that fry up flat, tender, and sweet in a pan of butter. Big's Place, located in a former gallery in the town of Painter, is a wonderful place to eat a plate of these puffers, as well as more familiar fare such as soft crabs (what the locals call softshells), fried seaside oysters, and shrimp and grits. Pray that grandmom's coconut sour cream cake is available when you come. If it isn't, Pauline's ultra-tall lemon meringue pie is a fine sweet-tart consolation.

Swelling toads aren't on the menu at the vintage Exmore Diner, a wood, tile, and stainless steel streamliner just off the main road on Business Route 13, but they frequently are available, as are fried, meaty ribs from large black drumfish—a migratory fish that's available locally come spring and summer. The Exmore is also known for its pancake-flat, griddle-cooked blue-crab cakes ("shell is possible," the menu warns), beautiful fried butterflied shrimp, and a platter of all types of seafood on offer, which is, the house boasts, the "largest plate anywhere." Breakfast, featuring such mid-

Clockwise from top left: Big's Place in Painter, Virginia; a server at Doumar's, in Norfolk; Metompkin Seafood, in Mappsville; slices of Smith Island cake at Becca's, in Tasley (see [page 24](#) for a recipe).



Atlantic signatures as creamed chipped beef, sausage gravy biscuits, and scrapple with grits, is an especially propitious time to eat here, for the Exmore is where the town comes to share its morning news, and it is small enough that conversations are communal. Our most recent visit was just after the Christmas blizzard of 2010; counter and booths were abuzz with tales of plowing, busted pipes, frozen gas lines, and treacherous back-roads snowdrifts.

South of Exmore in Machipongo, Quail Cove Farms operates a store dedicated to all kinds of natural and organic foods, including Ohio Amish flint cornmeal and pork sausage from hogs “raised with care.” Proprietor Bill Jardine grows his own sweet potatoes—several varieties, including Hayman and Hernandez, as well as supermarket standard Beauregard, with its pumpkin orange flesh. In the summer, count on Quail Cove to stock an inventory of gorgeous tomatoes, familiar and exotic; as much as 80 percent of Virginia’s tomato crop comes from the Eastern Shore.

Year-round, Cape Charles—just north of the Bridge-Tunnel—is a destination for hungry pilgrims who come to Sting-Ray’s, a place the locals call Chez Exxon because it is located in a filling station. Informal as Sting-Ray’s is, this one-of-a-kind diner offers masterful renditions of such luxury local meals as crab imperial and stuffed flounder, as well as fried seaside oysters as good as anyone’s. Sweet potato pie is a specialty, each slice topped with damson plum preserves, and Sting-Ray’s ham biscuit wins our nomination to the Sandwich Hall of Fame. It is country ham, Virginia-style, meaning salty but not insanely so, sliced thin and loaded into a biscuit. This is not a regular biscuit, but a sweet potato biscuit: warm and painfully tender, its soft orange earthiness a perfect foil for the chewy pink ham inside. It is an intoxicating yin-yang flurry that arouses appetite even as it sates it. Each biscuit costs \$1.62, which is about the most pleasure per penny of any food we’ve ever found. 🍴

THE GUIDE

Virginia’s Eastern Shore

Becca’s 24399 Lankford Highway, Tasley; 757/789-3686; beccascakesandmore.com

Big’s Place 35044 Lankford Highway, Painter; 757/442-5535

Exmore Diner 4264 Main Street, Exmore; 757/442-2313; exmorediner.com

Metompkin Seafood 14209 Lankford Highway, Mapps ville; 757/824-0503

Quail Cove Farms 12435 Machipongo Lane, Machipongo; 757/678-1275

Sting-Ray’s 26507 Lankford Highway, Cape Charles; 757/331-1541



Crab Imperial

SERVES 6

This spicy crab casserole is a specialty of Sting-Ray’s, in Cape Charles, Virginia.

- 8 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 3 tbsp. flour
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 lb. jumbo lump crabmeat, picked over for shell pieces
- 1 cup panko bread crumbs
- ½ cup finely chopped red bell pepper
- ¼ cup finely chopped yellow onion
- ¼ cup finely chopped parsley
- 2 tbsp. sherry
- 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1½ tsp. worcestershire
- 1 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. dry mustard powder
- ½ tsp. cayenne pepper
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Toasted, sliced country bread, for serving

1 Heat oven to 400°. Heat 5 tbsp. butter in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add flour, and cook, stirring, until smooth, about 2 minutes. Whisk in cream, and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium, and cook, stirring, until thickened, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in crabmeat, half the bread crumbs, bell pepper, onion, half the parsley, sherry, juice, Worcestershire, half the paprika, mustard, cayenne, and salt and pepper. Divide mixture evenly among 6 shallow 6-oz. ramekins; place ramekins on a baking sheet and set aside.

2 In a small bowl, mix remaining butter, bread crumbs, and paprika until evenly combined; sprinkle seasoned bread crumbs evenly over each ramekin. Bake until lightly browned and bubbling in the center, about 20 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining parsley and serve hot with toast on the side.

Smith Island Cake

SERVES 10–12

Our recipe for this towering dessert (pictured on page 23), featuring eight layers of buttery yellow cake with chocolate-fudge icing, was inspired by a decadent version served at Becca’s Smith Island Cakes in Tasley, Virginia.

FOR THE CAKE:

- 24 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted, plus more for pans
- 3½ cups flour, plus more for pans
- 4 tsp. baking powder
- 1½ tsp. kosher salt
- 2¼ cups sugar
- 2 cups milk
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- 6 eggs

FOR THE ICING:

- 2 oz. unsweetened chocolate, chopped
- 2 oz. semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract

1 Make the cake: Heat oven to 350°. Butter and flour four 9” cake pans; set aside. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl; set dry ingredients aside. Whisk together butter, sugar, milk, vanilla, and eggs in another bowl. Pour wet ingredients over dry ingredients, and using a whisk, stir together until just combined; let batter sit for 15 minutes. Stir batter again until smooth, and then divide half the batter among prepared pans; tilt cake pans around to let batter cover entire bottom. Bake cakes, rotating pans halfway through cooking, until barely browned, about 15 minutes. Let cakes cool for 20 minutes in pans, and then invert onto wire racks to cool completely. Clean and dry pans, and grease and flour again; divide remaining batter among pans, and repeat baking process.

2 Make the icing and assemble the cake: Bring both chocolates, sugar, milk, and butter to a boil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat; cook, stirring often, until sugar dissolves, chocolate melts, and mixture is smooth and shiny, about 8 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in vanilla; let icing sit until thick enough to spread, about 30 minutes. Place one cake on a cake stand and, using an offset spatula, spread with ¼ cup icing; repeat with remaining cakes and 1½ cups icing, leaving top cake un-iced. Chill cake to set icing between cakes, about 30 minutes. Rewarm remaining icing, if necessary, and spread over top and sides of the cake; let icing cool before serving.

TODD COLEMAN

LOCAL GRINDZ ON O'AHU



Photos: Chiuco Townsend

O'ahu food traditions are legendary, a tribute to the multi-ethnic population that has evolved since the islands were settled. Here are two 'ono (delicious) ways to experience the unique local food culture known as "local grindz."

FOOD TRUCKS AND PLATE LUNCH Food trucks, those moveable feasts that have taken mainland cities by storm, are known as lunch wagons in Hawai'i. They served up meals to plantation workers in the 1930s and provided culinary relief to servicemen bored with commissary-issue food during World War II.

The iconic meal at lunch wagons was and still is the plate lunch: two scoops of rice, mayonnaise-laden macaroni salad, and a hefty portion of protein (beef, chicken, pork, tofu)—usually of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, or local Hawaiian origin. Parked wherever there are surfers, construction workers, or businessmen, lunch wagons satisfy the heartiest of appetites.

Today, lunch wagons are ubiquitous on O'ahu and the heart and soul of local grindz. Having evolved from plate lunches to all manner of local favorites, eaters will find shrimp and grits at **Soul Patrol**; Korean barbecue tacos at **GoGi Korean Tacos**; tempura and noodles at **Yajima Ya**; Filipino specialties at **Elena's**. There's a monthly gathering of food trucks in Honolulu called **Eat the Street**, a foodie extravaganza of local and ethnic specialties which reflects Hawai'i's global food appetite.

OKAZUYA When a lunch wagon isn't near, island residents go to an okazuya for their beach or picnic-in-the-park lunch treats. These Japanese-style delicatessens specialize in tasty ethnic dishes that you select individually to build a meal. Start by choosing your rice (maki sushi, cone sushi, or musubi) and perhaps some noodles (chow mein or chow fun). Then pick a protein or two...or three: teriyaki chicken or beef, shoyu hot dog or Spam, fried chicken, miso butterfish, tonkatsu (deep-fried pork cutlet). Mac salad and namasu, a type of pickled slaw, are must-have sides on an okazuya plate, and diners choose their favorites to add to the meal. Okazuya reputations are made on dishes like nishime (stewed Japanese vegetables), tofu or fish patties, hash, vegetable tempura, and gobo (burdock root).

Okazuya selections are arranged on a paper plate or in a Styrofoam box and off you go! Most okazuya sell out of items by 2 p.m. and the truly top-notch places are few in number. But like lunch wagons, they are a tribute to the tastiest of island food traditions.

To discover more of O'ahu's culinary finds, go to visit-oahu.com

Where to Eat

LUNCH WAGONS

Locations can be found at www.streetgrindz.com

EAT THE STREET Last Friday of the month. 555 South Street, Honolulu, 4:00 P.M. – 9:00 P.M.

O'AHU OKAZUYA

FUKUYA DELICATESSEN AND CATERING

2719 S. King St., Honolulu • www.fukuyadeli.com

GULICK DELICATESSEN

1512 Gulick Ave., Honolulu • 1936 S. King St., Honolulu

SEKIYA'S RESTAURANT & DELICATESSEN

2746 Kaimuki Ave., Honolulu • www.sekiyasrestaurant.com

MASA AND JOYCE

45-582 Kamehameha Hwy., K ne'ohe • www.masaandjoyce.com

SOURCE

Crunch Time

These graham crackers are a grown-up treat

BY JANE BLACK



WHAT A DISAPPOINTMENT most of today's graham crackers would be to the Reverend Sylvester Graham. A leader in the 19th-century temperance movement, Graham was also one of America's early food reformers; commercial breads drew his particular ire due to the chemical additives, such as alum and chlorine, used to whiten the flour. He recommended baking healthful crackers with what came to be known as graham flour—coarsely ground, minimally processed unbolted wheat. That refined flour is the main ingredient in most of today's crackers bearing Graham's name is bad enough. That they are often dusted with cinnamon, a spice Graham claimed could provoke unrestrained sexual appetites and even insanity, would certainly have been abhorrent to the upright reverend.

I don't entirely approve of commercial graham crackers, either, loaded as many of them are with high-fructose corn syrup and partially hydrogenated oil. But I am a fiery advocate of Pollystyle's version: crisp cookies with a rich, caramelized flavor and a substantial crunch, which outdo mass-produced graham's powdery sweetness. Washington, D.C., baker Polly Brown bakes them with honey and whole wheat flour. (She hasn't yet found a source that will provide true graham flour in bulk.) Brown was first drawn to graham crackers as part of her quest to restore traditional baked goods—real English muffins, proper scones—to their rightful glory. About seven years ago, she began combing through vintage cookbooks for graham cracker recipes. She wasn't looking to go all the way back to Graham's recipe; the original was a thick and rather stodgy thing. Instead, she tried to better the ones she loved as a girl, enriching them with butter and a touch of dark brown sugar. The result is a slightly voluptuous, wholly satisfying biscuit.

Pollystyle's crackers would be terrific in any of the usual ways we use graham crackers: blitzed and blended with butter for a pie or cheesecake crust, or dripping with melted chocolate and marshmallows in s'mores. Not that they require much, if anything, in the way of embellishment: I nibble them plain with a cup of afternoon tea or spread a thin layer of almond butter on them. Even better, I serve them at cocktail hour with ripe Camembert, sliced pear, and (with apologies to Reverend Graham) glasses of chardonnay. Pollystyle graham crackers sell for \$6.50 per dozen, plus shipping. To order, call 202/258-7052. 🐦

*Sometimes it's the little,
unassuming moments that
stay with you, forever.*



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INGREDIENT

Bone Gatherer

Sometimes the most delectable part of the animal isn't the meat

BY MEI CHIN

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED MEAT on the bone—spicy, messy chicken wings; pan-fried pork chops; the beef ribs my mom used to bake, coated in bread crumbs and mustard butter—but I never really thought about bones until a recent trip to South America forced me to take them seriously. I had signed on as a camp cook for a birding expedition to a remote part of Central Suriname. We were helicoptered onto a patch of bare rock several thousand feet above sea level, a place where, we were told, no human had been before. We were surrounded by jungle filled, not only with birds, but venomous snakes. I was assured by my companions that any resident jaguars would mistake me for a small mammal and, hence, lunch. Torrential rains flooded camp every night, and our waterlogged satellite phone died, leaving us with no contact to the outside world.

It was a feral life. I hacked through bamboo with a machete, washed my hair in a stream. I cooked with peanut butter, rice, and from time to time, the roasted carcasses of the birds that we had collected. I had learned the weird but beautiful art of preparing specimens, a painstaking process in which you separate the bird's skin from its flesh while leaving much of the skeleton intact. We had set up bird-checking nets a bit higher on the mountain, and I would check these while my mates were out exploring. The rocks above camp were slippery with moss and rain. I have been clumsy since I was a child, but in the mountains, I got very good at falling—indeed, I became kind of addicted to it.

It wasn't until a couple of weeks after my return to the States, when I took a spectacular spill on some hotel stairs, that my falls on the mountain came back to me with a vengeance. I found myself in excruciating

pain, with a broken hip, and doctors were telling me that my left femur—the leg bone between the pelvis and knee—was so messed up, it would have to be replaced. I'd be off my feet for months. According to the older Chinese women in my life, I was supposed to eat a lot of bones, in keeping with the traditional Far Eastern belief that you should eat whatever body part is ailing—owl eyes for myopia, pig lungs for emphysema. Condemned as I was to crutches and virtual house arrest, the old beliefs started to make sense.

Besides, despite my own fragility, bones are powerful things. In ancient China, they were used to make prophecies. In the Gabriel García Márquez novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a girl carries her parents' bones around in a sack, where they clank and groan until a spot is located for their burial. In my favorite fairy tale, the bone of a murdered man is carved into a flute, which plays a song that reveals the killer. There is a restlessness in bones, a personality that endures long after the owner has passed on.

I began my convalescence by making a stock from beef necks and veal knuckles the color of old lace. When I saw them—beautiful, haunting—I was reminded of the animals from which they came. When you look at a steak you don't necessarily think of a steer, but the neck bones, shaped like giant jacks, conjured the massiveness of the animal and how it moved.

Nothing demonstrates the elemental magic of bones more aptly than a stock. Any Chinese child with the flu will know the taste of pork bone and ginger stock, hot, heady, and healing. Korean babies are weaned on *sullongtang*, the milk-white soup made from beef bones simmered for anywhere from 12 hours to days on end. The French chef Auguste Escoffier claimed that a great kitchen is founded on great stock; serious cooks approach their stocks with shamanic intensity. It's a matter of extrac-

MEI CHIN is a fiction and food writer living in Dublin, and a regular contributor to *SAVEUR*.





tion. Protein, sugar, and fat break down during cooking and are released from the meat and bones into the water in which they steep. And while the meat contributes to flavor, the bones, loaded with collagen, impart body and a velvety mouth-feel.

Home from the hospital, staring at the stove in my apartment's small kitchen, revisiting old volumes on my shelves—the fairy-tale collections and cookbooks and photo albums—I began to entertain a romantic notion of the perfect broth, based on the memory of a *brodo* I had when I was 11 years old on a chilly March evening in Venice. Limpid, sweet, and nuanced, it was as fortifying as wine or tea—a rich yet balanced infusion of meat, bone, and aromatics. Broth has always been part of my cooking repertoire, but I've frequently allowed mine to boil because I could not be bothered to watch the pot. If there's one thing all the cookbooks I now pored over agreed on, it's that should your broth ever so much as begin to boil, you should throw it away. During boiling, particles of fat and protein are agitated and become suspended in the liquid; a boiled broth is murky and greasy.

In pajamas and slightly stoned from daytime television and Percocet, I had plenty of time on my hands—time enough, finally, to heed the experts. I set my stove to its lowest heat and prepared to wait a very long time: By all accounts, the water—and beef bones and turkey wings, carrots, onion, garlic, celery, and bay leaf—would take more than an hour just to come up to temperature. I left the pot on the stove overnight and all the next day. A *brodo* should barely simmer; several seconds should pass between bubbles. At a very low and constant heat, unwanted impurities released from the meat and bones will coagulate and rise to the top or cling to the sides of the pot, and they can be easily skimmed off.

When at last I strained the broth, the result was pure alchemy: a clear, golden liquid with a perfume much greater than the sum of its parts—there were notes of caramel and nutmeg, butter and clove. It was one of the most thrilling moments I've experienced as a cook. How often do we manage to duplicate perfectly a romantic notion? I garnished my first bowl with curls of Parmesan and sipped it slowly, inhaling the sweet steam.

OF COURSE, THESE DAYS it's trendy to be into bones, not only wings and ribs, but

Mare e monte, an Italian take on surf and turf: marrow, scallops, celery root, and black truffles nestled in a halved bone (see [page 32](#) for a recipe).

TODD COLEMAN

chicken necks and ham hocks and shanks. Much as many chefs can now be found flaunting their affinity for bones, they're still a fantastic bargain: At my local butcher, marrow bones go for \$2.99 a pound. This is true of all sorts of bones and bony cuts. Sometimes, if a customer orders a noisette—the meaty eye of the rack of lamb—my butcher will even give me the bony remainder for free.

Years ago, the same butcher had taught me how to french a rack of lamb, a technique that involves scraping some of the meat away with a long, thin knife to lay bare a fringe of elegantly curved bones. Now, laid up and armed with a boning knife, I found the taxidermy skills I'd acquired in Suriname useful. I started frenching everything in sight, and was alarmingly good at it. I turned chicken wings into chicken lollipops and frenched itty-bitty rabbit racks. I found out that the technique also worked wonderfully with shank—the length of bone and meat just below the knee—by far my favorite part of any animal.

Lamb shanks braised low and slow, until the meat is tender and the bones release

The marrow was silk on my tongue, and yet the white bone on the plate retained an echo of the visceral and the wild

their marrow to enrich the braising liquid, are always marvelous served with something starchy to soak up the sauce—polenta, mashed potatoes, risotto—but I like them best when they're set, gigantic and resplendent, on a bed of white bean purée. Frenching the shanks makes the presentation that much more spectacular, a hunk of meat beckoning at the end of a length of parchment-colored bone. When I tried it, I browned the shanks thoroughly before putting them in the oven, and I made sure to turn the meat every half hour or so for an evenly caramelized exterior. Cooking a shank in this way is virtually foolproof due to its high ratio of bone to meat; because the bone absorbs heat, the meat immediately surrounding it cooks slowly and is the most succulent. And let us again not forget the collagen that attaches the meat to the bone. Over the course of cooking it turns to gelatin—a special treat to enjoy once you've dispensed with the meat.

Then there's marrow. When the creamy, voluptuous stuff is scooped from the bone's hollow, it can be stirred into a sauce to add





lushness. It is the best part of an osso buco—that’s Italian for “bone with a hole”—and once you’ve stripped the meat from the long-braised veal shank and devoured it, inside that bone you’ll find a final treat, a secret store, best coaxed out with a long, slender spoon.

To eat marrow—the tissue that produces new blood—is to indulge in an act that treads the boundary between the rude and the refined. There was, in fact, a time not too long ago when my supermarket was selling marrow only as a dog treat. But once I felt well enough to put on a dress and hail a cab, marrow was the first thing I sought. Together with my new hip—a man-made bone fashioned from enameled metal—I headed to a Manhattan restaurant called Ai Fiori.

If eating marrow is typically a messy, primal, hands-on affair, at Ai Fiori, chef Michael White has resolved the issue by halving the bone lengthwise. For the dish he calls *Mare e Monte* (“sea and mountain” in Italian, a play on surf and turf), White lines the halved bone with celery root purée, nestles in overlapping disks of steamed scallop and black truffle, lays out a layer of marrow on top, and then broils the whole thing. It was silk on my tongue, marrow I could eat with a knife and fork, a subtle balance of flavors and textures—and yet the white bone on the plate retained an echo of the visceral and the wild. It conjured what lurked in the shadows on that mountaintop where I fell so many times, and it evoked my mending body ensconced in that gleaming haute dining room, my crutch still at my side.

With bones, in other words, the possibilities for reincarnation are endless. A joint becomes a stock, which then becomes the base for *pot au feu*, or another rich, meaty stew. I’ve even taken to roasting cuts from animals on racks made from their bones, a roast beef on a bed of marrow bones. It’s culinary id. At some point, though, my fridge started to look like a boneyard, my hair smelled like veal, and I began to long for another life, one away from the stove and skipping on both legs. Still, I am grateful for the chance that being hobbled for a while presented me: to linger in the kitchen while things cooked slowly; then to grip the bones in my fist, use my teeth to strip the meat, and quietly relish the savagery—and the delicacy—of it all. 🐾

Clockwise, from top left: tortellini in *brodo*, a classic Italian broth; chicken lollipops; braised lamb shanks; deviled baby back ribs. (See [page 32](#) for recipes.)

TODD COLEMAN (4)

Braised Lamb Shanks

SERVES 6

Chef Tom Valenti of Manhattan's Oust uses the foreshank, a meatier cut than the hindshank, for this recipe for shanks (pictured on [page 31](#)) braised in a stock flavored with wine, aromatics, and anchovies.

- 6 lamb foreshanks, trimmed Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup olive oil
- 2 ribs celery, roughly chopped
- 1 large carrot, roughly chopped
- 1 large yellow onion, roughly chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup tomato paste
- 1 tbsp. whole black peppercorns
- 5 sprigs thyme
- 3 anchovy filets
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 head garlic, halved crosswise
- 2 cups red wine
- 1 cup white wine
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup white wine vinegar
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 4 cups veal or chicken stock

1 Make the lamb shanks: Heat oven to 325°. Using a paring knife, cut each shank to the bone 1" from the narrow end to help expose the bone while cooking; season generously with salt and pepper, and set aside. Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add celery, carrot, and onion, and cook, stirring, until very soft, about 10 minutes. Add tomato paste, and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 2 minutes. Add peppercorns, thyme, anchovies, bay leaf, and garlic, and cook, stirring, for 3 minutes more. Add both wines, vinegar, and sugar, and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, add stock, and keep stock mixture warm.

2 Heat remaining oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add lamb shanks, and cook, turning as needed, until browned on all sides, about 4 minutes. Transfer shanks to a large roasting pan, and pour stock mixture over and around shanks. Cover with foil, and bake in oven for 1 hour. Remove foil, and continue cooking, turning shanks every half hour, until tender and caramelized, about 3 hours.

3 Remove shanks from braising liquid and pour liquid through a fine strainer into a bowl; skim any fat on the surface. Serve lamb shanks with liquid as a sauce.

Brodo

(Beef Broth with Tortellini and Parmesan)

SERVES 6-8

This classic Italian broth (pictured on [page 30](#)), is adapted from a rec-

ipe in Lynne Rossetto Kasper's *The Splendid Table* (William Morrow Cookbooks, 1992).

- 4 lb. turkey wings, cut into 3" pieces
- 2 lb. beef shank bones, trimmed
- 2 ribs celery, roughly chopped
- 2 large carrots, roughly chopped
- 2 large yellow onions, unpeeled, roots trimmed, roughly chopped
- 2 sprigs parsley
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 clove garlic, unpeeled, crushed
- 1 lb. cheese-filled tortellini pasta
- Parmesan, for serving

1 Place turkey wings and beef bones in a 12-qt. saucepan and cover with cold water by 4"; place pan over medium heat and let mixture come to a very slow simmer, skimming off any foam or impurities that rise to the surface in the meantime. Add celery, carrots, onions, parsley, bay leaf, and garlic, and return to a slow simmer; cook, occasionally skimming fat and any impurities from the surface, for 6 hours. Add 5 cups boiling water, and continue cooking, adding more boiling water as necessary to keep solids submerged, for 6 hours more.

2 Remove from heat, pour through a fine strainer into a large container, and discard solids. Let broth cool to room temperature, and then refrigerate until chilled. Once chilled, remove hardened layer of fat from surface of broth, and discard.

3 To serve, reheat broth in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring broth to a boil, and then add pasta; cook, stirring, until al dente, about 7 minutes. Ladle pasta and broth into serving bowls, and top with freshly grated Parmesan cheese.

Chicken Lollipops

SERVES 6-8

These spicy, soy-marinated chicken wings (pictured on [page 31](#)) get their elegant "lollipop" shape from a technique called frenching. (See "Frenching 101," on [page 82](#), for step-by-step instructions on frenching the chicken wings.)

- 2 tbsp. soy sauce
- 12 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 2 serrano chiles, stemmed and sliced
- 1 2" piece ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cornstarch
- 1 tbsp. paprika
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. red food coloring

(optional)

- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 2 lb. chicken wing drumettes, meat pulled to one end, opposite end trimmed
- Canola oil, for frying
- Coriander chutney, to serve

1 Combine soy sauce, garlic, chiles, ginger, and 2 tbsp. water in a food processor, and process until smooth. Transfer to a large bowl and stir in flour, cornstarch, paprika, food coloring (if you like), egg, and salt; add chicken lollipops, and toss to coat evenly with the marinade. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour, or refrigerate for 4 hours.

2 Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. Dutch oven, and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Working in batches, fry chicken lollipops until golden brown and cooked through, about 7 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to paper towels to drain briefly before serving. Serve with chutney for dipping.

Deviled Baby Back Ribs

SERVES 4-6

A crunchy, mustard-laced bread crumb coating makes a particularly delectable contrast to the sweet and tender meat on pork baby backs (pictured on [page 30](#)).

- 2 racks (3 lb.) pork baby back ribs
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3 tbsp. heavy cream
- 3 tbsp. cayenne pepper
- 2 tbsp. Dijon mustard
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried bread crumbs
- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted

1 Heat oven to 375°. Season ribs generously with salt and pepper, place in a shallow roasting pan, and bake until tender, about 40 minutes. Let cool.

2 Meanwhile, stir together cream, cayenne, and mustard in a small bowl; spread evenly over ribs. Sprinkle ribs with bread crumbs, and then drizzle with butter.

3 Heat broiler to high. Broil ribs until topping is browned and crusty, about 4 minutes. Flip ribs, and broil until browned on the bottom, about 3 minutes. Cut ribs into individual bones to serve.

Mare e Monte

(Scallops and Truffles with Beef Marrow)

SERVES 8

In this elegant take on surf and turf (pictured on [page 28](#)), served

as an appetizer at Ai Fiori in New York City, chef Michael White nestles sweet scallops, black truffles, and celery root purée into split marrow bones (see [page 84](#)) and broils them under a blanket of bone marrow.

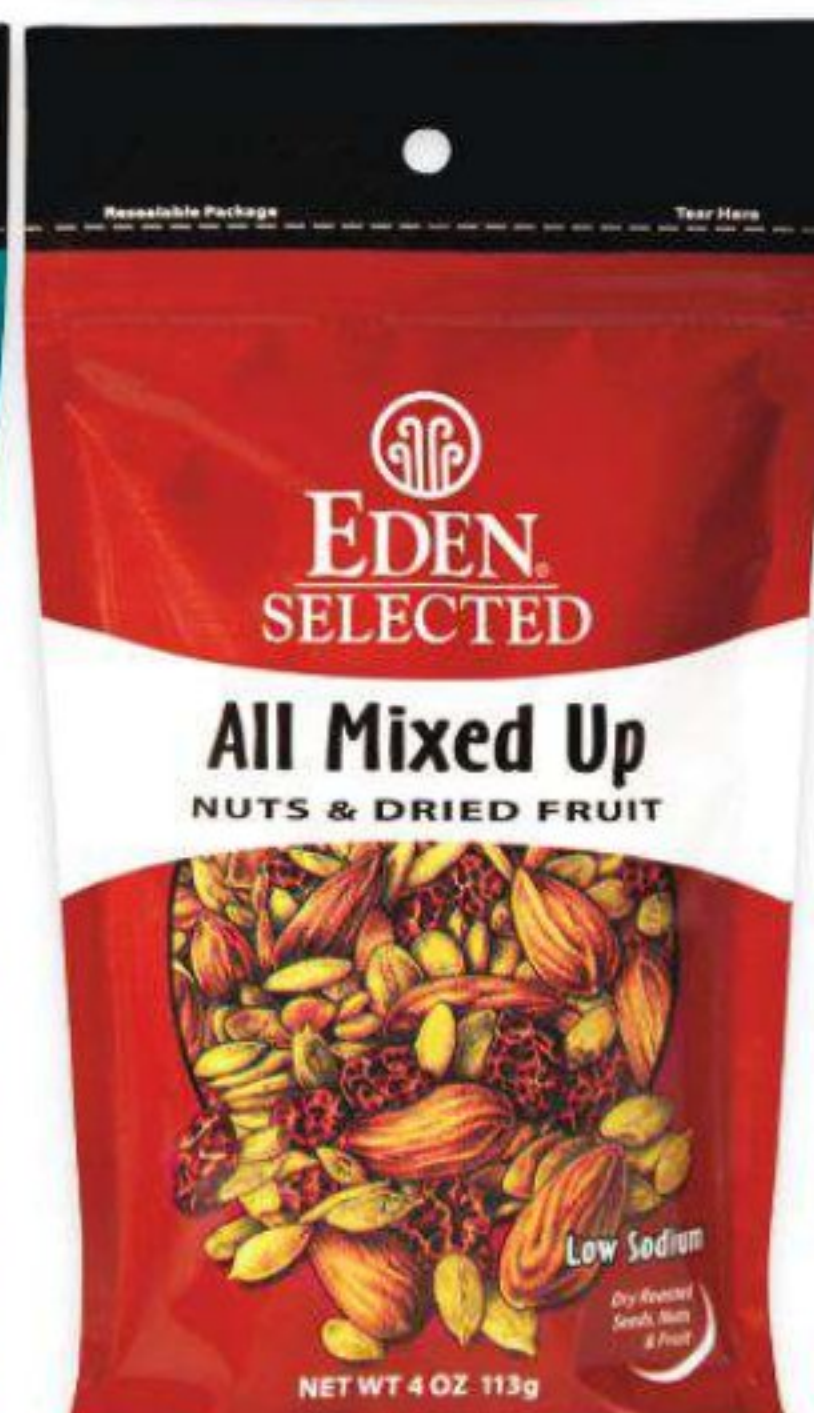
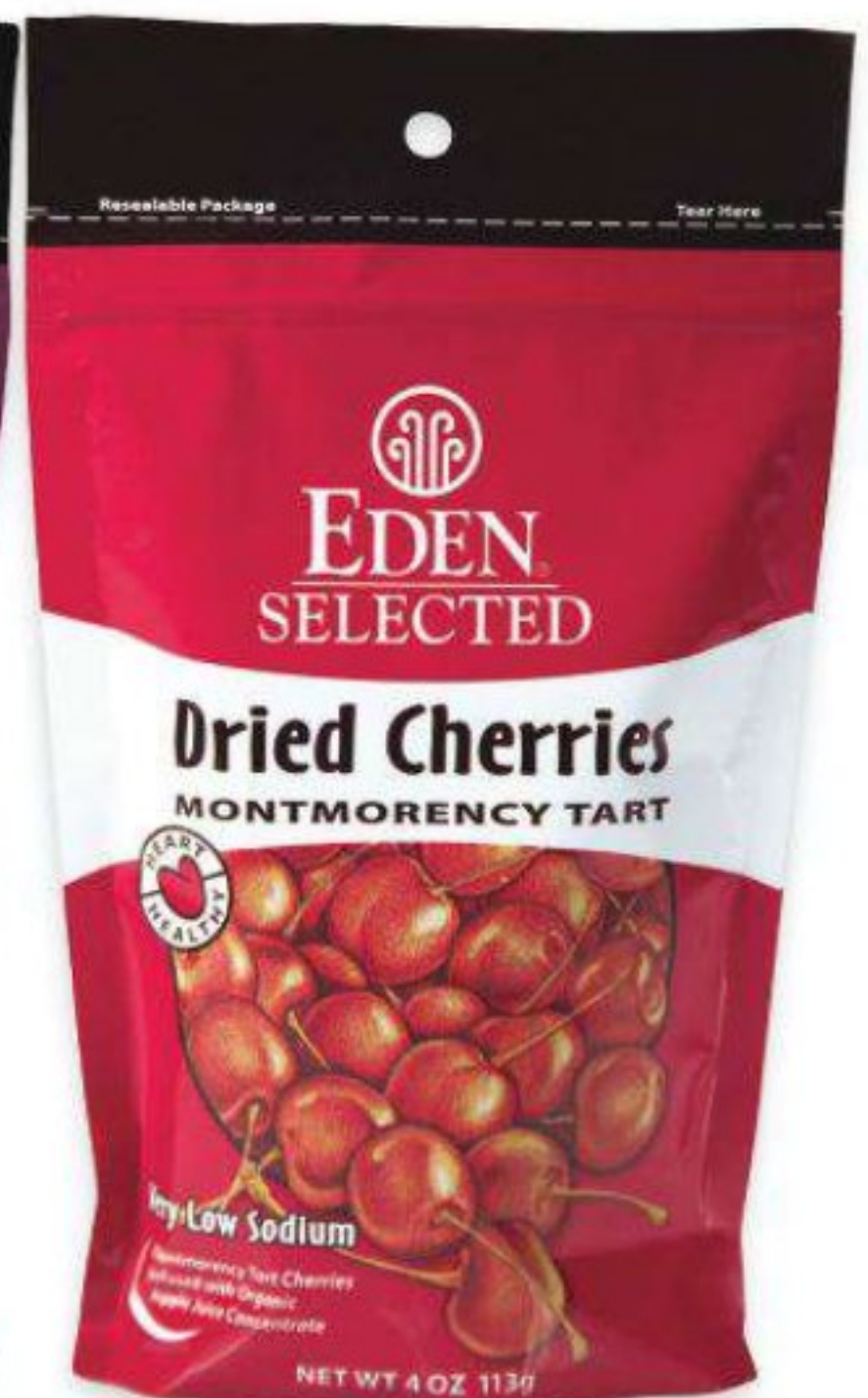
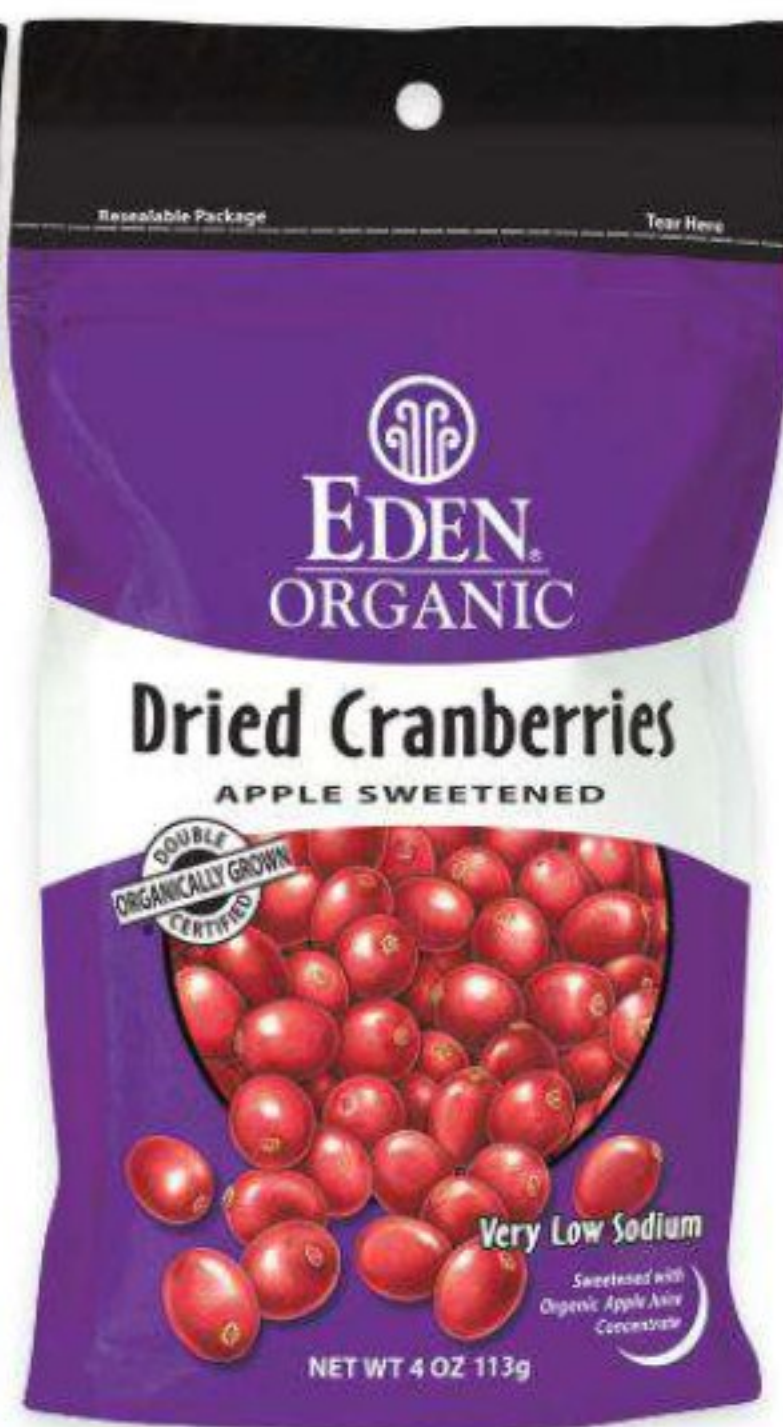
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp. sherry vinegar
- 2 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped black truffles, plus 2 oz. thinly sliced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. celery root, peeled and roughly chopped
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 8 split beef marrow bones (see [page 84](#))
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup distilled white vinegar
- 6 diver scallops
- Chicory or other peppery lettuce, to serve
- Celery leaves and fleur de sel, to garnish

1 To make the vinaigrette, whisk together oil, sherry and balsamic vinegars, finely chopped truffles, and salt and pepper; set aside.

2 To make the celery purée, bring celery root, stock, and cream to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat, and cook, stirring, until very tender, about 35 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer celery root to a food processor, and purée with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cooking liquid; transfer to a bowl, season with salt and pepper, and set aside.

3 Using a paring knife, remove raw marrow from bones, and slice thinly; reserve. Bring distilled vinegar and 10 cups water to a boil in a 6-qt. saucepan over high heat, and add bones; cook until bones are bright white, about 45 minutes. Drain and let cool. Meanwhile, bring 1" of water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan with a steamer basket insert; add scallops and cook until cooked through, about 5 minutes. Remove scallops and let cool; cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ "-thick slices, and set aside.

4 To serve, heat broiler to high. Place bones, cavity side up, on a rimmed baking sheet, and fill each with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup celery root purée. Alternately lay scallop and black truffle slices on top of purée; drizzle with some of the vinaigrette. Lay slices of bone marrow lengthwise over scallops and truffles, and then broil until marrow is just melted, about 1 minute. Transfer to serving plates with a bed of lettuce underneath, and garnish with celery leaves and fleur de sel; drizzle more vinaigrette over marrow.



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ESSAY

Toujours Paris

A writer returns to the city of her childhood through books old and new

BY ALEKSANDRA CRAPANZANO

THE DAY I MOVED TO Paris, I wept. I was 11 years old and full of preteen angst. My new bedroom, with its elegant moldings and deep marble fireplace, held for me none of the comfort of my old bedroom in New York City, which I'd painted a hideous lilac and covered with horse posters. I found no solace, either, in the fact that my new room had once belonged to the writer George Sand. My parents were mystified by my distress but had the good sense to suggest a walk down our new street, the Rue du Cherche-Midi, to the legendary Boulangerie Poilâne. Near the cash register, I noticed a basket of butter cookies; the cashier said rather encouragingly, "*Je vous en prie, Mademoiselle*" ("Go ahead, Miss"). So I took one. It was a simple cookie—just a bite of pure French butter with a hint of sugar and a slightly sandy crunch—but no less a revelation for that. Delicate but sturdy, with almost burnt edges: a cookie with no pretensions, but made by a master. In a nice ironic twist, the cookies were called *punitions*—punishments. My homesickness ended with my very first bite.

These many years later, I return to Paris as often as possible, which is not nearly often enough, and in between make do by reading and cooking my way back. You could fill several libraries with the versions of the city that various writers have conjured over the years; the Paris books I consistently pull off the shelf don't hew to any particular era

or genre. But if each of the authors reveals a yearning for this place as wholly personal as my own, we all agree that it is food, or the recollection of it, that transports us there most reliably.

A few of these are well-thumbed cookbooks that I keep wedged on the windowsill of my Brooklyn kitchen. To begin with, there is Patricia Wells's *The Paris Cookbook*, which translates the glorious food of the city's best restaurants and shops into recipes that never fail me. If my hankering for Paris is particularly consuming, I might start dinner with the cream of watercress soup I first ate more than a dozen years ago at the venerable restaurant Taillevent, near the Arc de Triomphe; follow it with chef Jean-Guy Lousteau's "Basque-spiced" (that is, mustard, thyme, dried chiles, and garlic) leg of lamb, created for the tiny bistro Au Basco in the Marais; and finish with a fresh lemon tart from the Bonbonnière de Buci, a pâtisserie I loved dearly on one of the Left Bank's liveliest market streets. Such a cure for homesickness elicits only more, of course, and so, for reassurance, I reach for Dorie Greenspan's *Paris Sweets*. It includes many of my favorite Parisian desserts—my beloved *punitions* from Poilâne; the brown-butter *financiers* that master baker Jean-Luc Poujauran made famous at his eponymous bakery; and the sublime chocolate tart created by Robert Linxe, founder of La Maison du Chocolat.

But of all my cookbooks, the one I revisit most frequently is a little-known volume called *Parisian Home Cooking* by Michael Roberts, the late, French-trained California chef renowned for his indulgent and creative dishes. Cramped kitchens and temperamental ovens are facts of life in Paris, and the city's

home cooking reflects a marriage of time-honored tradition and last-minute improvisation. Marketing is a daily event. Planning is on the go. Cheese and bread will round out the meal, and a pâtisserie-bought fruit tart will bring it to a close. Roberts might put a whole chicken in the oven with some shallots and garlic and then make a sauce in the same pot with wine and cream; or he might coddle a steak for two minutes in a skillet with a generous quantity of butter and produce a quick pan sauce with wine, vinegar, and mustard; or he might simply poach a few eggs in a saucepan of tarragon-infused cream. Simple fare, but never austere.

Still, there are times when a perfect recipe, a great meal even, simply will not satiate

It was a simple cookie—a bite of pure French butter with a hint of sugar and a slightly sandy crunch—but no less a revelation for that

my longing. That is when I reach for A.J. Liebling's *Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris*. Wickedly witty, loving, and acutely perceptive, this is a book that lends itself to savoring; a page here or there, read on the fly, is as filling as the feasts Liebling so generously recounts. Written in the 1960s, it details a year of formidable "feeding"—as Liebling dubbed his particular style of voracious eating—in the 1920s, when the author was 22, a student, and spending what little money he had in the cafés of the Latin Quarter. "It is from this weighing of delights against their cost," he insists, "that the student eater (particularly if he is a student at

ALEKSANDRA CRAPANZANO received the M.F.K. Fisher Award for Distinguished Writing from the James Beard Foundation in 2009. This is her first article for SAVEUR.



A classic photo by Brassai, of lovers
in a café near the Place d'Italie, Paris,
circa 1932

the University of Paris) erects the scale of values that will serve him until he dies or has to reside in the Middle West for a long period." A "good but simple" restaurant on the Left Bank is the "reference room" in which Liebling develops his critical acumen, the Closerie des Lilas, where he sips vermouth cassis with his boxing partners, and the cafés of the Boulevard Saint-Michel, where he finds female companions. There are tips here for the aspiring feeder—Liebling suggests, for example, seeking out restaurants in which you see "priests eating with priests, or sporting girls with sporting girls," as those are "two classes of people who like to eat well and get their money's worth." But this is really a coming-of-age story, with food in the customary role of sex, restaurants offering the enticements of a brothel, and Paris as, well, Paris—a city that encompasses all varieties of appetites.

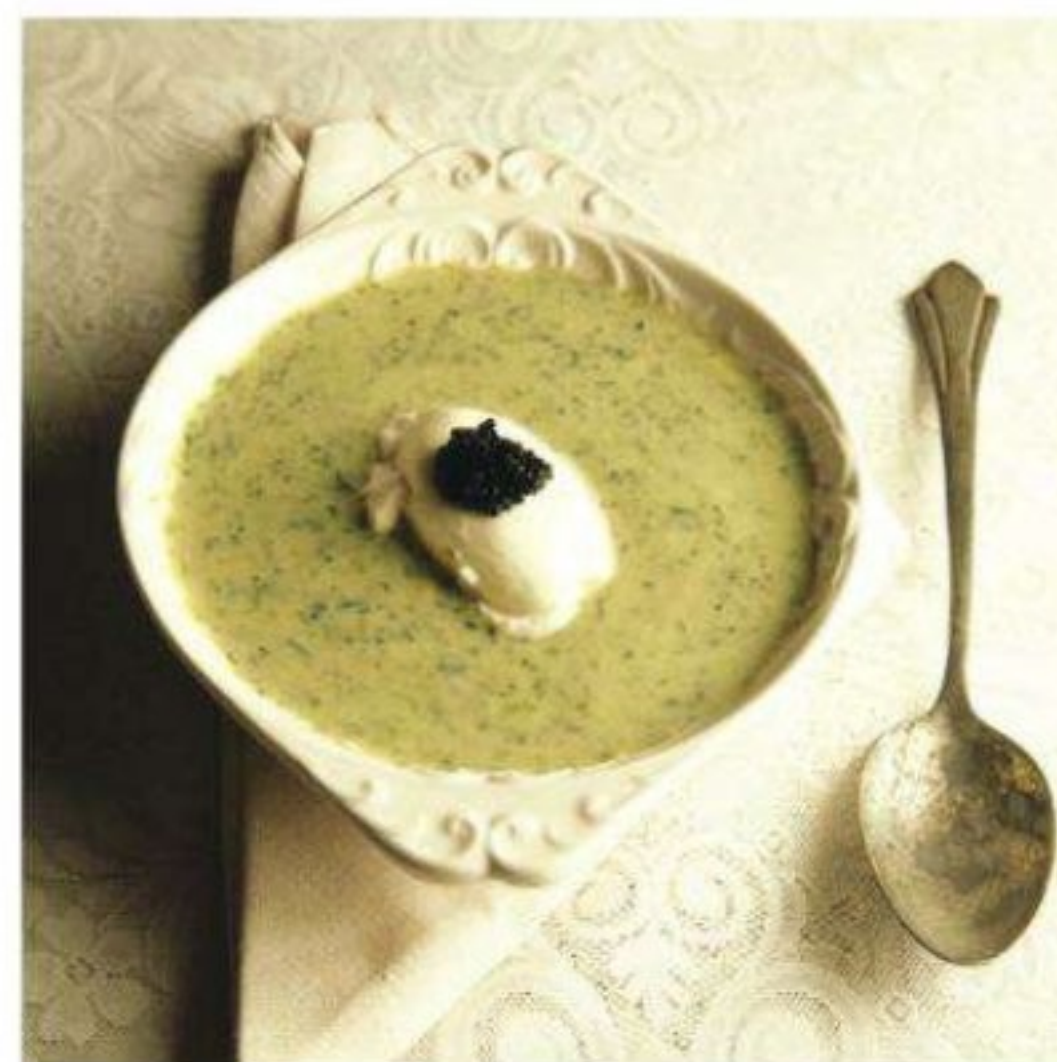
For something a little less rich but no less satisfying, I'll reach for *Remembrance of Things Paris: Sixty Years of Writing from Gourmet* and turn immediately to the essays by Joseph Wechsberg. A *Gourmet* magazine correspondent from the end of the 1940s until the beginning of the 1980s, Wechsberg was a thinker and an observer; he had an intimate knowledge of the city and its *habitudes*. Of a waiter in a favorite bistro Wechsberg writes, "He nodded his approval when I kept my knife and fork after the hors d'oeuvre, and for the first time he gave me a glance. He saw that I knew the rules." And his appreciation for the great Parisian chefs was such that at the legendary La Tour d'Argent, he reserves some of his most loving prose for a simple salad "that shows

what these artists in the kitchen do with a few fine lettuce leaves, a very light vinaigrette dressing, thinly sliced mushrooms, and cut boiled potatoes, which take the vinegar out of the vinaigrette and make it mild and soft and wonderful." There are superb essays on Paris, too, in Wechsberg's memoir *Blue Trout and Black Truffles* and in the collection *Trifles Make Perfection*, both of which have been reprinted in paperback in the past ten years—a very good thing, because his writings mightily deserve rediscovery.

All of these are books I've returned to repeatedly over the years, but since Paris is probably the most obsessively documented of all cities, I am also occasionally presented with a new and arresting view. I've lately taken to poring over the photographs by Christian Sarramon in the lavish coffee-table book *Paris Pâtisseries*, among the sexiest I've seen. One particular image of a cheesecake, a glistening white dome topped with a single dark raspberry made by pastry chef Claire Damon, almost makes one turn away for decorum's sake. "Ispahan," an utterly romantic structure of rose, raspberry, and litchi created at the trendy pâtisserie Pierre Hermé, has a fleeting, fragile beauty that should inspire a line of lingerie if not a book of sonnets. But it's the last photograph in the book that makes me want to reach for a spoon: a cloud of chantilly cream with a dusting of hazelnut praline shards presented in a stemmed metal dish, from Berthillon, maker of the best ice cream in Paris.

Berthillon steadfastly refuses to reveal its recipes, but I can happily make do with the one for espresso-caramel ice cream in David Lebovitz's *The Sweet Life in Paris*. Lebovitz was a pastry chef at Berkeley's Chez Panisse, and this, his memoir of life as an expatriate in Paris, is punctuated by excellent recipes—for fromage blanc soufflé, cinnamon meringue, and bacon and blue cheese cake, to name a few favorites. And while I find myself smiling at his gripes and quips about Parisians, there's little room in my nostalgia for such complaints. There is, however, always room for his chocolate mousse laced with floral, spicy Chartreuse liqueur.

But this afternoon, here in Brooklyn, I will sit with my six-year-old son, Garrick, in our garden, looking at his favorite Paris book: *Paris From Above*, photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand's aerial portrait of the city. With my mouth already beginning to water, I'll challenge him to find Boulangerie Poilâne, on the street of my childhood, and reward him with a *punition*, still warm from our own oven. He is finding his way to Paris already. 🍷



Cream of Watercress Soup

SERVES 4–6

Watercress lends a peppery kick to this elegant springtime soup from *The Paris Cookbook* by Patricia Wells; garnished with heavy cream and caviar, it's a luxurious first course.

- 10 oz. watercress, stems removed
- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 lb. leeks, white and light-green parts only, halved, rinsed, and thinly sliced
- 1 large yellow onion, finely chopped
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 3 cups heavy cream
- Freshly ground white pepper, to taste
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 tbsp. caviar, such as ossetra (optional)

1 Bring a 4-qt. saucepan of water to a boil and add watercress; cook until bright green and wilted, about 3 minutes. Drain and place watercress in a bowl of ice water; let sit for 1 minute. Drain, squeezing out as much liquid as possible; set aside.

2 Heat butter in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Add leeks, onion, and salt, and cook, stirring, until vegetables begin to soften, about 6 minutes. Add stock and 2 cups heavy cream, and bring to a simmer; cook, stirring occasionally, until slightly reduced and vegetables are tender, about 30 minutes. Add watercress and cook until warmed through, about 5 minutes. Transfer soup to a blender, or use an immersion blender; purée until smooth. Return to saucepan, season with salt and white pepper, and keep warm until ready to serve.

3 To serve, place remaining cream in a bowl and beat with a whisk until soft peaks form; stir in lemon juice and season with salt and white pepper. Divide soup among serving bowls and top with a dollop of seasoned whipped cream; garnish whipped cream with some of the caviar.

TODD COLEMAN

A Paris Reading List

The Paris Cookbook by Patricia Wells (HarperCollins, 2001)

Paris Sweets by Dorie Greenspan (Broadway Books, 2002)

Parisian Home Cooking by Michael Roberts (William Morrow, 1999)

Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris by A.J. Liebling (Simon and Schuster, 1962)

Remembrance of Things Paris: Sixty Years of Writing from Gourmet ed., Ruth Reichl (Modern Library, 2004)

Blue Trout and Black Truffles by Joseph Wechsberg (Knopf, 1954)

Trifles Make Perfection by Joseph Wechsberg (David R. Godine, 1999)

Paris Pâtisseries by Christian Sarramon (Flammarion, 2010)

The Sweet Life in Paris by David Lebovitz (Broadway Books, 2009)

Paris from Above by Yann Arthus-Bertrand (Chêne, 2010)



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CLASSIC

Full of Beans

In New England, baked beans are an enduring tradition

BY GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

IT'S A BRISK NOVEMBER morning, and I've just arrived in Lisbon Falls, a small town 25 miles outside Portland, Maine, where I've come to learn more about one of the earliest and, in my opinion, most delicious American dishes—baked beans. I have always loved this rich casserole of legumes, smoky pork, and sweet molasses, and I figured that there is no better place to start my quest than at a proper New England baked bean supper. So I'm meeting Margaret Logan, who is in charge of tonight's meal at the Lisbon United Methodist Church, a fund-raiser that takes place on the fourth Saturday of each month. For \$7, attendees can get their fill of sliced ham, frankfurters, coleslaw, brown bread, soft rolls, homemade pie, and long-simmered baked beans.

At 7:30 A.M. in the church's fluorescent-lit kitchen, Logan, a white-haired woman in blue jeans and a navy sweatshirt, is already hard at work. She's been volunteering at these suppers—or “suppahs,” in Maine parlance—for almost 40 years, and she has eaten beans every Saturday night since she can remember. In this part of the world, the Saturday baked bean supper is a way of life. The communal tradition spans back to the late 1800s, and it still takes place in firehouses, grange halls, and churches throughout New England. According to Logan, “There's a bean *suppah* every week somewhere.”

Logan is making a big batch using navy beans, which she prefers for their mild flavor and

creamy texture. She soaked her beans the night before, a step that rehydrates them so they cook evenly. Just as important as soaking, Logan says, is choosing varieties that will hold their shape. Though most common beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) work well, many of the preferred types are grown in the region: dense yellow eye beans, which are ivory with a caramel spot; soldier beans, starchy and white with mahogany markings; Jacob's Cattle, nutty-tasting, red-speckled beans; and small, ivory-colored navy beans.

Logan pours her beans into a huge crock pot and heaps in quartered onions, salt pork, brown sugar,

ketchup, mustard powder, garlic salt, and molasses. She covers it all with water, gives them a stir, and sets them to cook on low heat for the next eight hours. Though these are technically stewed beans, and not oven-baked (as was traditional), the meal is nearly identical to what New Englanders have been eating for centuries.

MAINE IS BAKED BEAN COUNTRY. The oldest factory that cans them, B&M, still operates out of Portland. Ask people what their favorite beans are, or the best way to cook them, and you will not only get an answer, but you may also spark an argument. In *Serious Pig: An American Cook in Search of His Roots* (North Point Press, 1996), a book that includes an impressive baked bean manifesto, author and part-time Maine



A pot of New England-style baked beans.

TODD COLEMAN

resident John Thorne writes that the state is “still a place where to be described as full of beans is to be complimented.”

Perhaps passions run so high in this part of the country because baked beans are one of the original Colonial foods. According to Maine-based historian Sandra Oliver, the English settlers brought pea seeds so they could make pease pottage, a nourishing stew made with peas and flavored with salted meat. But the plants weren’t hardy enough for New England’s harsh climate. Beans, however, were indigenous to North America and thrived, so the settlers used them in the dish instead.

The Saturday bean-supper tradition emerged from two aspects of Colonial life: routine and religion. Saturday was a baking day, and once the bread was done, beans slowly simmered in the oven’s residual heat. Along with other early American foods, brown bread was typically eaten with the beans. Together, the beans and bread formed a protein-rich meal. In observance of the Puritan Sabbath, cooking was forbidden from sundown on Saturday until sundown on Sunday. The beans cooked all day Saturday, were ready for supper that night, and were eaten the following day.

Baked beans fed more than just family. They sustained lumberjacks, miners, and other laborers who needed filling, inexpensive food. In the Northeast, cooks in logging camps prepared “bean hole” suppers by burning wood down to hot embers in a pit that they had dug in the ground, then lowering in a lidded pot of beans, and refilling the hole with dirt. At the end of the workday, a hot meal awaited the workers. New England’s baked bean traditions are similar to, and may have influenced, other regional styles of baked beans: Québécois *fèves au lard*, Southern barbecued beans enriched with smoked pork, and cider baked beans from Appalachia.

Though we think of baked beans as sweet, the dish, in fact, started out savory. The first

recorded recipe, published by Lydia Maria Child in *The American Frugal Housewife* in 1829, called simply for salt pork, beans, and black pepper. Beans became sweet in the mid-1800s when home cooks started to add small amounts of molasses to their bean pots. They grew even sweeter when canned versions, spiked with much more molasses, became popular. Some might lament the “candyfication” of baked beans, yet the popularity of canned baked beans deserves much of the credit for the longevity, and global reach, of this New England dish. (The world’s biggest consumer of baked beans, the United Kingdom, took to the dish in the 1880s, when it was introduced as a luxury canned import.) B&M alone sells more than 5 million cans per year.

AFTER LEARNING SO MUCH about baked beans, I was eager to make a batch of them myself. I soaked two cups of navy beans overnight, and by the next morning, they had absorbed most of the water. According to the instructions in the New England volume of the wonderful *Time-Life Foods of the World* series, I gently boiled the beans until the skins popped open when I blew on them (a neat trick that indicates they’re ready).

In a lidded clay pot, I layered salt pork I had brought back from Rosemont Market & Bakery, a food shop in Portland, Maine, with beans, more pork, molasses, and mustard powder, then added more beans and embedded a clove-studded peeled onion in the mixture. I covered the beans with water and slid the pot into a 250-degree oven. Soon enough, the sweet smell of molasses developed, followed by the aromas of onion, clove, and pork, and finally, the starchy scent of slow-cooked beans. After six hours, I removed the lid so the beans could develop a flavorful crust on top, then I served myself some. One small bowl with some good bread was all I needed for dinner that night, which is exactly the point of this time-tested dish. 🐷

New England-Style Baked Beans

SERVES 6–8

Flavored with molasses, maple syrup, and rum, this filling bean dish (pictured on [page 38](#)) is simple to prepare; all it takes is time. Six hours of cooking yields thick, rich results. Serve it with hearty brown bread (see [page 83](#) for a recipe) to mop up its flavorful sauce.

- 1 lb. dried navy beans, picked over and rinsed
- 1 medium yellow onion, ends trimmed, peeled, and left whole
- 4 whole cloves
- 8 oz. slab bacon or salt pork, trimmed and cut into 2" x ¼" pieces
- ¼ cup plus 2 tbsp. maple syrup
- ¼ cup unsulfured molasses
- 2 tsp. dry mustard powder
- ½ cup ketchup
- 1 tbsp. cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp. dark rum
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 Bring the beans and 10 cups of water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over high heat, and cook for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat, cover the saucepan with a lid, and let the beans sit for 1½ hours. (This “quick soak” produces effects similar to those achieved by soaking the beans in water overnight.) Drain the beans in a colander, and discard the cooking liquid.

2 Heat oven to 250°. Stud the onion with the cloves and place in a 4-qt. Dutch oven along with the beans, bacon, maple syrup, molasses, dry mustard, and 3 cups boiling water; stir to combine. Cover pot with a lid, and place in the oven; cook, lifting the lid and stirring occasionally, for 3 hours. Stir in ketchup and vinegar. Cover with lid again, and return to the oven; cook, stirring occasionally, until the beans are tender and the liquid has reduced to a thick glaze, about 3 hours more.

3 Stir in rum; season with salt and pepper. Ladle into bowls; serve with brown bread, if you like.



Magical Fruit When it comes to choosing dried beans for making baked beans, there are plenty of options. The most common variety—and the ones used in canned baked beans—is **navy** (far left), or pea beans, which are small, white, and starchy, with a mild neutral flavor. In recent years, however, growers have been reviving several New England heirlooms. One popular type is the **soldier bean** (second from left), a white kidney-shaped legume named for the maroon marking near its eye that is said to resemble a toy soldier. These cook up creamy but keep their shape and are relatively mellow in flavor. In Maine, where people are particularly opinionated about beans, **yellow eye beans** (far right) are the most popular for baked beans. Off-white with a caramel-colored spot, they’re similar in texture to navy beans but have a more distinct earthy flavor. Another beloved Maine variety that’s perfect for baked beans, **Jacob’s Cattle** (second from right), is ivory-colored with maroon speckles, and tastes somewhat sweet and robust. All these heirlooms can be purchased online, and you may even find them at your local farmers’ market. —G.G.



ETERNAL

ANCIENT WAYS OF LIVING AND EATING THRIVE IN THE TRANSYLVANIAN COUNTRYSIDE

BY ALEXANDER LOBRANO PHOTOGRAPHS BY LANDON NORDEMAN



THE RAIN

JUST NORTH OF BUCHAREST, I left this century behind, and an hour later, the last one fell by the way-side, too. As I slowed the car to turn onto a dusty country road, a farmer in blue serge overalls stopped pitch-forking freshly scythed hay just long enough to give a wave, and the honeyed scent of linden flowers wafted in through the open car windows.

I'd first glimpsed Transylvania through the window of a train traveling from Istanbul to Prague a decade earlier. What I'd seen then—a fascinating medieval landscape of deep forests, small, tidy farms, and fortified hilltop villages—made me want to be there, to walk its fields, to taste its food. But I knew next to nothing about the region (apart from the inevitable associations with Bram Stoker's fictional Count) until I started coming across articles in the London papers about agro-tourism in post-Ceaușescu Romania a few years ago. After the downfall of one of communism's most dire dictators, several repatriating Transylvanian nobles had opened country house inns. Much of what I read warned that Transylvania was still "in transition" (read: rough around the edges). This was all that I needed to hear. In the making, history is shaggy, sexy, confusing. For me, any place "in transition" is irresistible. Apparently, I share this inclination with the Prince of Wales. He had become so smitten by the abandoned Saxon villages of Transylvania that he'd underwritten the Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET) to help restore them; through the MET, I learned, you can rent a restored village cottage as a base from which to explore the region and its foodways.

I set off for Transylvania along with my friend Nadine. We arrived at Miklósvár, a village about three and a half hours north of Bucharest and an ancestral seat of the Kálnoky family, just as the cows were coming home. Around a bend by the church, the wide main street was suddenly filled with the caramel-colored herd returning from the pasture that surrounds the village. Miklósvár's denizens, who were sitting on wooden benches outside their pastel-painted cottages to gab with neighbors while watching the event that marks the end of each day, couldn't help but be politely amused when our car was surrounded by the lowing beasts. When I caught the eye of an old man wearing a shaggy sheepskin vest, he smiled and shrugged, his friendly way of telling me what everyone in Transylvania seems to know: If some things can't be hurried, most others shouldn't be either.

ALEXANDER LOBRANO's most recent article for *SAVEUR* was "New Stockholm Cuisine" (January/February 2012).

**WE WERE
WELCOMED
TO THE
HOUSE
WITH
SHOTS OF
BRACING
BRANDY
INFUSED
WITH
CARAWAY
SEEDS,
AND
SLICES OF
CRUMBLY
ALMOND
CAKE**





At 186 Strada Principală, our destination and the handsomest house in the village, with its immaculate white-washed walls and terra-cotta swallowtail roof, we were welcomed into the formal parlor with bracing shots of caraway-seed brandy and slices of crumbly almond-lemon cake. Despite the wildflowers in an art nouveau vase carefully placed in the middle of a lace doily on a table, this well-kept room had an atmosphere of disrupted gentility. It was Nadine who later noticed the gap between a faded circa-1900 photo of three blond boys in sailor suits at a Black Sea resort and the more recent color portraits of our host, Count Tibor Kálnoky. The chronological hole in the family album began with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I, when previously Hungarian Transylvania became part of Romania. Then came the 1920s land reform that broke up the estates of the Hungarian aristocracy, an attempt on the part of the Romanian government to weaken that influence and solder the region to a new motherland. Then World War II, and the mad years of the Ceaușescu regime. The endless upheavals slowed the pace of development here, locking the region into a fascinating but fragile time warp.

We arrived hours later than we expected—suffice it to say that signposts are scarce and mostly incomprehensible in Romania—so after our snack, we joined the other guests at Kálnoky's main guesthouse for dinner. Here you eat according to the same early-to-bed, early-to-rise rhythms as the locals, especially since the village women who work in the kitchen have their own families to feed. At a long table in the wine cellar, an excellent, floral but dry Transylvanian riesling encouraged an easy conviviality between a German engineer from Munich and his wife, a London lawyer and his cousin, two Scottish ladies, and Nadine and me. We began with a rich lentil-and-ham bone soup, and then shared a pork roast with delicious crackling. It was served with wild mushroom gravy, parsleyed potatoes, pickled red and green chile peppers, and freshly baked bread, made from coarsely ground wheat and corn flour, that had a gentle, beery smell of yeast. Everything was simple, earthy, and satisfying. All of it came from within a couple of miles of our plates, the dishes typical, I would come to discover, of what you'd find on the table of any prosperous Transylvanian farmer.

Since it was a warm night, dessert, coffee, and fruity, fiery homemade plum brandy were served after dinner in the garden. A pair of kerosene lanterns cast a soft light on two sugar-dusted cakes filled with sour cherry preserves laid out on the plank picnic table, and a dove cooed in the larch tree in the middle of the garden. Over the wall, hens were settling in for the night, and near the well, fireflies punctuated the darkness with pale-green dashes. After everyone else had gone to bed, I (*continued on* [page 46](#))



Clockwise from top: Agnes Elek gathers a rooster for her soup pot in Miklósvár; homemade wine at Gerda Gherghiceanu's farmhouse restaurant in Viscri; *csirkepaprikás*, a chicken stew served with *mămăligă cu smântână*, a coarse polenta topped with sour cream. (See [page 50](#) for recipes.) Previous pages: Marcu Stelian looking over a pasture in Viscri.





(continued from page 43) stayed behind and quietly compared the real Transylvania with the hazy fantasies that had made me want to go there. Judging by what I'd seen so far, I'd found a little-known corner of Europe where the farming and cooking predate not only World War II, but also the steam engine and everything else that has altered the food chain across the rest of the continent. Transylvania didn't just look like a fairy tale; it tasted like one, too.

THE COCKS WERE STILL crowing when Count Kálnoky introduced himself at the end of a traditional Transylvanian country breakfast of elderflower cordial (pleasantly fizzy, made with nothing more than elderflowers, lemons, sugar, and water), apple wood-smoked chicken, roasted eggplant, fresh green and red bell peppers, tangy curd cheese and firm smoked cheese with a chamois-colored rind, dried sausage, and more of that yeasty bread, served in the garden. He and a biology lecturer from Babeş-Bolyai University had come to lead an outing into the forest.

We settled into a wagon pulled by dark-brown dray horses and clopped down to the edge of the village and into the fields, which were filled with blue bells and wild orchids. Kálnoky, who grew up in Holland, Germany, and France, explained that this western part of Transylvania, where his family first settled in 1252, is Székely country. "The Székelys were the military caste of the Hungarian nobility, dispatched to defend and settle the frontiers of the empire," he told us; hence the fact that many places (and foods) in Transylvania have two names, a Romanian and a Hungarian one. Then he interrupted himself to point out a rare black stork and a meadow lark.

Aside from their beauty and rarity, the birds are interesting for what they say about the surrounding forest and fields of wheat, corn, barley, and hay. "Transylvania is a pre-industrial landscape with a flourishing mosaic of habitats that support both the local people and thriving wildlife," said Kálnoky. "After the collapse of communism, the collectivist farms were disbanded and traditional farming quickly revived. The irony is that even though our local produce would fetch an 'organic' premium in cities like London and Berlin, Romania's entry into the European Union means Transylvanian farmers must conform to absurd E.U. norms. It would be a tragedy if this biodiversity survived the madness of the Ceauşescus only to be done in by Brussels."

Now the wagon reached the local *stană*, a hilltop summer sheepfold where 600 sheep are milked by hand three times a day. The shepherds spend the entire summer with the flock, which is owned by local villagers, who

**AFTER A
DELICATELY
SOUR SOUP
WITH TINY
MEATBALLS,
WE
FEASTED ON
PAPRIKA-
LACED
GOULASH
AND A
COARSE
POLENTA
WITH
HOMEMADE
SOUR
CREAM**





visit occasionally to pick up their shares of the soft, sweet white cheese known as *orda* (in Hungarian) or *urdă* (in Romanian), and a tangy, firm feta-like cheese called *sajt* (Hungarian) or *caș* (Romanian).

Over a picnic—hard-boiled eggs from the Kálnoky henhouse, fried chicken cutlets, *urdă* cheese, tomatoes, cucumbers, pale-green peppers, bread—Kálnoky gave us a lesson in Transylvanian foodways. “Transylvania has three main kitchens: Hungarian, Romanian, and Saxon,” he said. The Saxons, most of whom have moved away, were German-speaking people from Flanders, Luxembourg, and the Moselle Valley invited to settle fertile lands on the vulnerable eastern boundaries of Hungary by King Géza II in the 12th century and King Béla IV in the 13th. “Together with the Székelys, they held off the Turks,” Kálnoky explained. The Turks had a big influence on local cooking, though. “Their tastes are reflected in the sour *ciorbă* soups we like so much”—the Turkish word for soup is *çorba*—“and they also brought us pickles and sweet desserts. The Hungarians gave us a taste for vegetables and paprika, although our main seasonings are still dill, lovage, parsley, and chives. We get our love of dairy products from the Saxons, who also introduced bacon, sausage, and lard.” But those are just the broad outlines. Over the centuries, other groups—Armenians, Jews, Roma (Gypsies)—have brought their own ingredients and ways of cooking to the Transylvanian kitchen.

Maybe because our appreciation was now informed, dinner that night tasted even better than it had the night before. After *ciorbă de perisoare*, a delicately sour vegetable soup garnished with tiny pork-and-rice meatballs, we feasted on paprika-laden goulash, baked penne-like pasta, roasted tomatoes, and *mămăligă*, Romania’s omnipresent staple, a coarser version of polenta, which is served with delicious homemade *smântână* (sour cream). Dessert was a rhubarb cake spiced with cinnamon.

After the meal I set off to offer my heartfelt thanks to the cooks. I found Agnes Elek and Katalin Simon scrubbing the white-tiled walls of their kitchen cottage. They blushed when my thanks were conveyed. “We just cook what we cook at home,” Elek said through a translator. “Of course there are some things we wouldn’t serve the guests,” added Simon. Like what? “Eggs preserved in cabbage juice,” she said, and they laughed. They found it even more hilarious when I asked if they’d share their recipes. “Recipes?” Elek said. “We don’t know any recipes—we just cook!”

LEAVING MIKLÓSVÁR The following day, we took dusty back roads to Criș, one of Transylvania’s most famous Saxon villages, where we’d rented a cottage. After Ceaușescu threatened these villages with destruc-



Clockwise from top left: pork with apples and cider cream sauce; shepherds return from milking their herd, outside Viscri; a kitchen at Count Kálnoky’s estate in the village of Miklósvar. Previous pages, clockwise from top left: lunch at Gherghiceanu’s farmhouse restaurant in Viscri; the village of Sighișoara; chicken soup with semolina dumplings; gathering hay in Criș. (See [page 50](#) for recipes.)

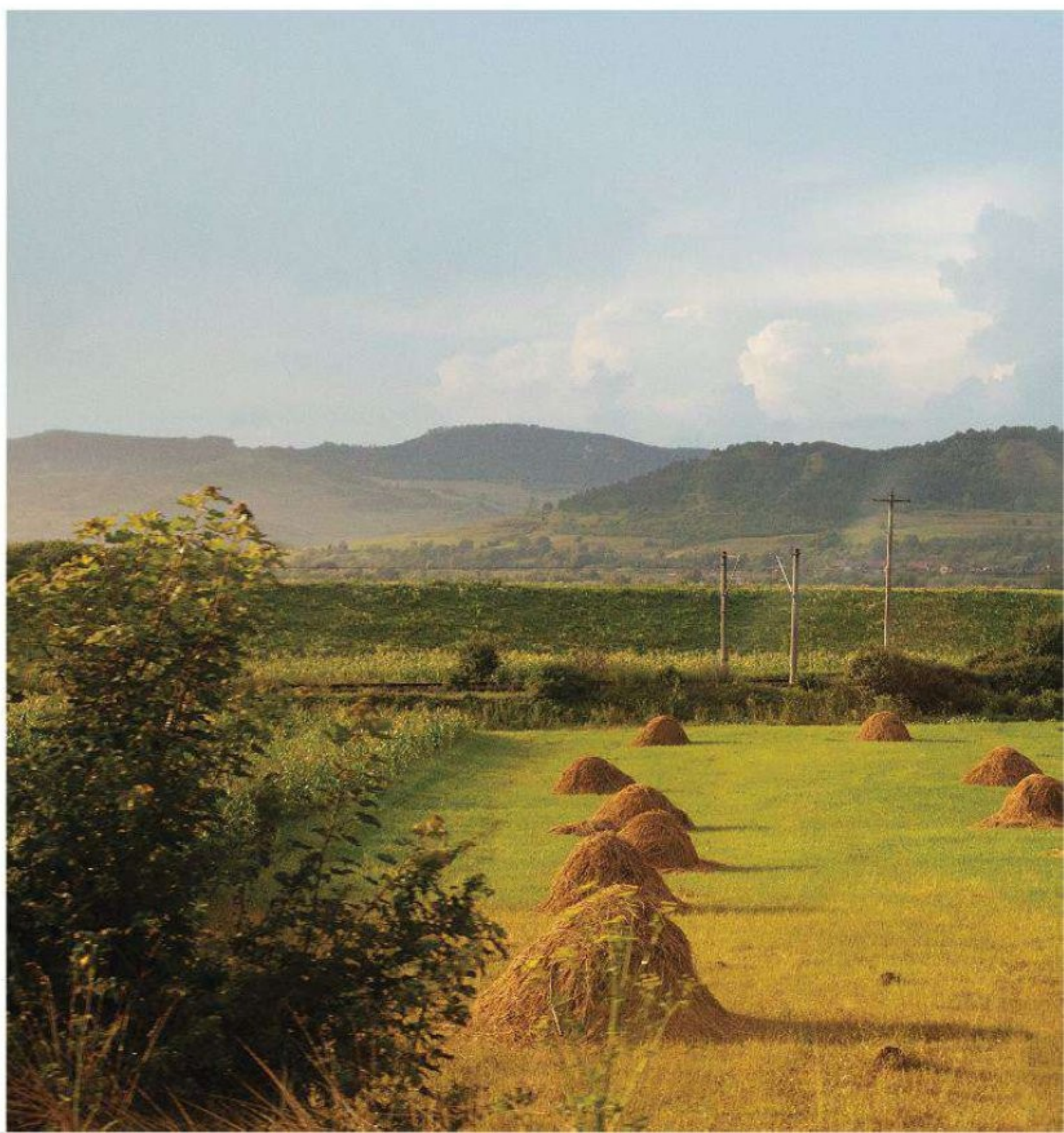
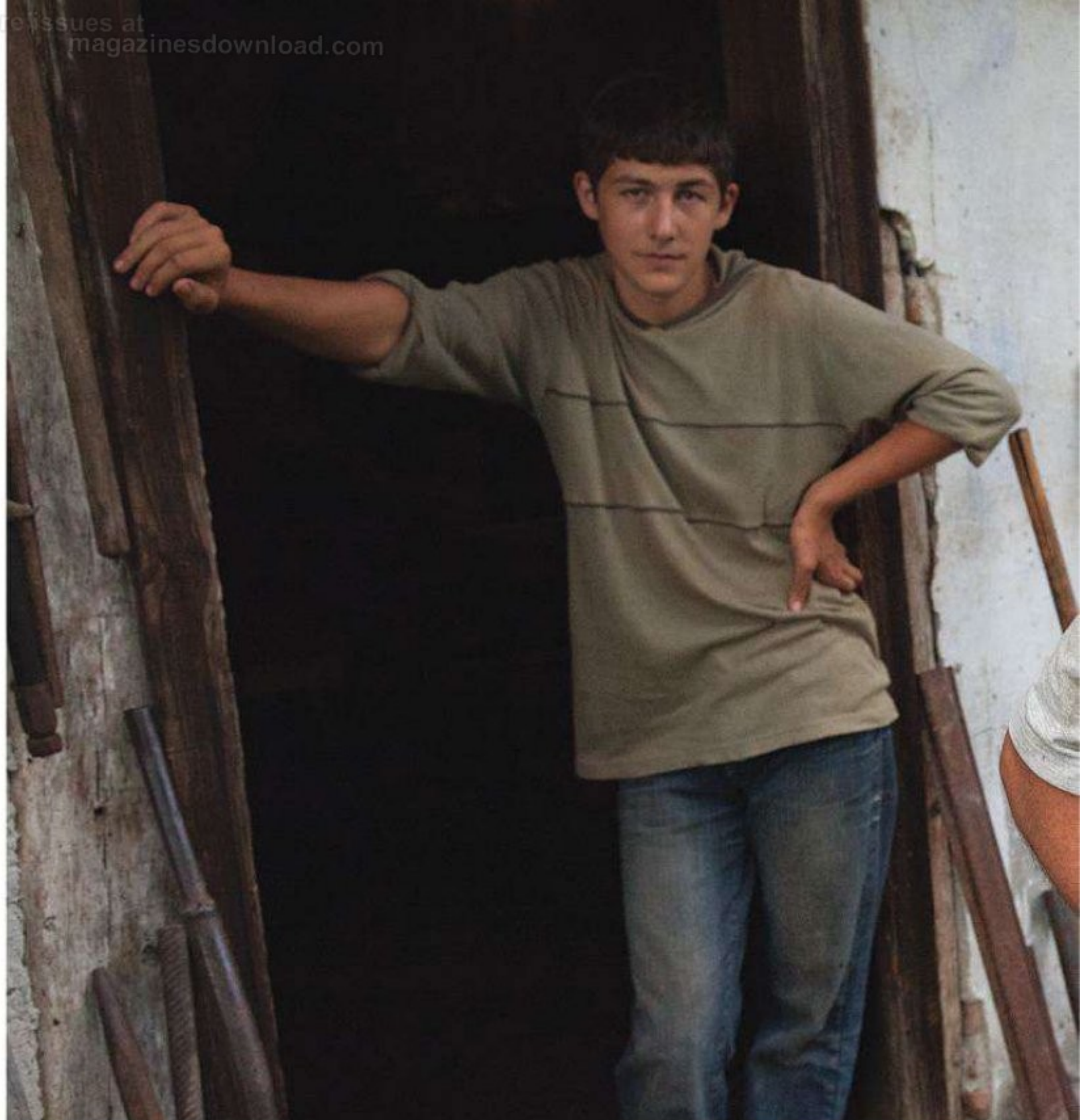
tion in 1989 because he resented the ethnic and cultural independence of the 900,000-strong Saxon community, most Saxons accepted a German offer of repatriation in the early 1990s. Following the huge disruption caused by their departure, the MET focused on preserving and reviving their villages, with an emphasis on low-impact tourism that would generate jobs for the villagers.

Inside our whitewashed 18th-century cottage, a stout bottle of apple juice, a loaf of bread, fresh butter, raspberry and plum jam, and some cheese and charcuterie—all home-made—awaited us in a willow basket. Settling down for a late-afternoon nap in a bed made up with lavender-scented hemp sheets softened by countless washings, I listened to the village—the light grinding of iron-rimmed wheels on the fine gravel of the road outside, the crowing of a discombobulated rooster, children giggling, horses neighing.

Every evening, dinner was delivered to the house by a different but unfailingly friendly woman. On our first night we feasted on *supă cu galuște* (a parsley- and lovage-scented chicken broth with airy semolina dumplings), homemade bratwurst, navy beans stewed with tomatoes and garlic, a white cabbage salad, and a coarse, nutmeg-scented walnut cake, all washed down with rough and pleasantly foxy homemade wine that made it very easy to drift off after dinner.

The following morning, the nearby village of Meşendorf looked like a stage set from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. We were there to visit the farm of Mariana and Gheorghe Bardas. Beyond the tattered Roma settlement on the edge of town, geese and ducks wandered the tidy green swards on the village's broad main street, which was shaded by pear, chestnut, and walnut trees. Past a gate in a wall just wide enough for a hay cart, the sweet smell of wood smoke filled the air of the Bardas' narrow plot. Mariana Bardas showed off her henhouse, pigpen, and vegetable garden planted with potatoes, beans, peppers, tomatoes, cabbage, carrots, corn, and onions. Then she swept the ashes from her wood-burning oven with green elder switches and loaded it with six big rounds of wheat-flour dough, enough to feed her family for two weeks. I was fascinated to see that she deliberately let the loaves bake past the point when another baker in another place might have considered them burned. When the bread emerged jet black an hour later, she let it cool and then beat each loaf with a wooden rolling pin to remove the char and reveal a thick nut-brown crust. On special occasions, she told us, to achieve a softer crust,

**IN OUR
18TH-
CENTURY
COTTAGE,
HOMEMADE
APPLE
JUICE,
BREAD,
BUTTER,
JAMS,
CHEESE,
AND MEATS
AWAITED
IN A
WILLOW
BASKET**



From top: Gyuri Barabas, the local blacksmith in front of his workshop with his apprentice, in the village of Miklósvár; haystacks in the fields outside Miklósvár.



she'd wrap the dough with cabbage leaves before baking.

Over the next few days, as we explored Biertan, Copșa Mare, Mălăncrav, and other Saxon settlements, taking pleasure in the sentient landscape, wandering the villages, and eating wholesome tasty farm food, I couldn't help but wonder if Transylvania's sweet hospitality and fragile beauty will survive the changes that modernity and increased connection to the outside world are sure to bring.

Then I met Gerda Gherghiceanu, who runs a simple restaurant in her farmhouse in Viscri, a typically Saxon village with a UNESCO-listed fortified church. One of the last Saxons in the village, Gherghiceanu's pride is serving echt Saxon dishes. Lunch in late June ran to a soup of deeply flavored rooster stock with runner beans, tomatoes, and carrots; a rich pork-and-potato stew fragrant with fresh marjoram; cabbage salad; and freshly baked almond cake topped with just-picked apricots. After Gherghiceanu shooed away our compliments, I changed the subject. Why had she stayed behind when so many other Saxons had left Transylvania? "I've traveled, you know. My brother lives in Germany, and he has a big house and a fancy car, but we have a much, much better life here," she said with a grin. "Best of all," she added, "my children know it, too." 🐦

The Guide Transylvania

Dinner for two with drinks and tip

Inexpensive Under \$10 **Moderate** \$10–\$60 **Expensive** Over \$60

Transylvania is a four-hour drive from Bucharest, Romania's capital. For help planning your trip, contact Romania Tourism (romaniatourism.com) and the Adept Foundation (fundatia-adept.org).

WHERE TO STAY

Casa Wagner

Piața Cetății 7, Sighișoara (40/265/506-014; casa-wagner.com) Rates \$120 double On the main square in Sighișoara, this pleasant hotel is a good base for exploring the Saxon villages of Transylvania.

Count Kálnoky's Estate

186 Strada Principală, Miklós-vár (40/742/202-586; www.transylvaniamcastle.com) Rates: \$190 double At these beautiful guesthouses, meals run to traditional dishes like *ciorbă de perisoare* (pork-and-rice meatball soup).

Mihai Eminescu Trust Guesthouses

10 Strada Cojocarilor, Sighișoara (40/754/212-372; mihaieminescutrust.org) Rates: \$40 per person The MET rents cottages in rural villages, with the option to order in meals from home cooks, or to dine with local families.

WHERE TO EAT

Casa cu Cerb

Strada Școlii 1, Sighișoara (40/265/774-625; www.casacucerb.ro) Moderate The "House of the Stag" serves excellent Romanian dishes, including *mămăligă* (a coarse polenta) and stewed chicken.

Gerda Gherghiceanu's Farmhouse Restaurant

Strada Principală 22, Viscri (40/741/009-889) Moderate Gherghiceanu serves terrific home-style Saxon cooking—crêpes with her own jams, hearty stews—in the courtyard of her farmhouse.

Unglerus Restaurant

Strada Decembrie 1, Biertan (40/269/806-699) Moderate This restaurant is famous for its Biertan platter, a spread of skinless sausages called *mititei* and other grilled meats. —A.L.



MAP: THE M FACTORY

Ciorbă De Perisoare

(Pork-and-Rice Meatball Soup)

SERVES 4

Ciorbă (from the Turkish *çorba*) is the Romanian name for a soup that has been soured—in this case, with a generous shot of fresh lemon juice. Pork-and-rice meatballs bring savory flavor and substance to the paprika-spiced broth (pictured at bottom right).

- 8 oz. ground pork
- ½ cup cooked white rice
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 ribs celery, finely chopped
- 1 medium carrot, finely chopped
- ½ red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 tbsp. paprika
- 6 cups chicken stock
- 1 15-oz. can whole, peeled tomatoes, drained and crushed
- 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped parsley

1 Mix pork, rice, egg, half the onion, and salt and pepper in a bowl until evenly combined. Form into eight 1½" meatballs, and chill.

2 Meanwhile, heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add remaining onion, celery, carrot, and bell pepper; season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 8 minutes. Add tomato paste and paprika, and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 2 minutes. Add stock and tomatoes, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low. Add meatballs, and cook, stirring occasionally, until meatballs are cooked through, about 15 minutes. Stir in lemon juice, and season with salt and pepper. Ladle soup and meatballs into serving bowls, and garnish with parsley to serve.

Chec Cu Nucă

(Romanian Walnut Panettone)

SERVES 8–10

This traditional Romanian sweet bread (pictured at top right) studded with rum-laced candied walnuts, makes a delicious dessert, breakfast bread, or teatime snack.

- 2 cups milk
- ¾ cup plus ½ tsp. sugar
- ¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- 2 ¼-oz. packages active dry yeast
- ½ vanilla bean, seeds scraped and reserved
- 1 egg
- 4 cups flour
- 1 tsp. kosher salt

- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup walnuts, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp. rum
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice

1 Make the dough: Combine 1 cup milk, heated to 115°, with ½ tsp. sugar, nutmeg, yeast, and vanilla seeds in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the hook attachment; let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Whisk in ¼ cup sugar and egg until smooth; add flour and salt, and mix until dough forms. Increase speed to medium-high, and knead for 4 minutes. While mixer is running, slowly add butter to dough, 1 tbsp. at a time, and mix until smooth; continue kneading for 4 minutes more. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and let dough sit until dou-



Clockwise from top left: *mititei* (grilled sausages); *prăjitură cu caise* (apricot cake); *supă cu galuște* (pork and rice meatball soup); *chec cu nucă* (Romanian walnut panettone).

bled in size, about 1 hour.

2 Meanwhile, bring remaining milk, sugar, walnuts, and rum to a boil in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat, and cook, stirring often, until liquid is reduced and mixture is brown and has thickened, about 15 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in juice; let walnut mixture cool completely. Punch down dough, and add walnut mixture to dough; return to mixer fitted with the hook attachment, and mix on low speed until walnut mixture is evenly incorporated into the dough. Transfer dough to a greased 8" x 5½" x 2" loaf pan and cover loosely with

plastic wrap; let sit until slightly risen, about 45 minutes.

3 Heat oven to 350°. Uncover loaf, and bake until golden brown and an instant-read thermometer reads 190°, about 1 hour, 15 minutes. Let cool completely.

Csirkepaprikás

(Chicken with Paprika)

SERVES 6–8

This rustic, rib-sticking chicken stew (pictured on page 42) is full of warming paprika, cumin, and chiles. Pair it with something starchy, like buttered potatoes or Romanian polenta with sour cream (see recipe below).

- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 3–4-lb. chicken, cut into 8



- 3 tbsp. finely chopped parsley

1 Heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Season chicken pieces with salt and pepper, and dredge in flour; add chicken to pan, and cook, turning once, until browned on both sides, about 15 minutes. Transfer chicken to a plate, and set aside.

2 Add garlic, bell peppers, celery, carrot, onion, and chile, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 10 minutes. Add tomato paste, paprika, and cumin, and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 2 minutes. Return chicken to pan along with stock, and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, covered, until chicken is cooked through, about 45 minutes.

3 Transfer chicken to a serving platter, and pour cooking liquid through a strainer into a bowl; discard solids. Season liquid with salt and pepper, and pour over chicken. Sprinkle with parsley before serving.

Mămăligă Cu Smântână

(Romanian Polenta with Sour Cream)

SERVES 6–8

This polenta-like pudding (pictured on page 42 with chicken with paprika; see above for a recipe), a staple across Romania, has a firm texture and a briny flavor from a salty, feta-like cheese mixed in at the end of cooking. A topping of more cheese and sour cream makes this a satisfying side dish.

- 4 cups milk
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter, plus more for greasing
- 2 cups quick-cooking cornmeal
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 cup finely crumbled feta cheese
- 1 cup sour cream

Bring milk and butter to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over high heat. Whisking constantly, add corn meal and salt and pepper, and cook until thickened and corn meal is cooked through, about 5 minutes. Stir in half the feta, and then transfer to a greased 9" pie dish; let cool until set, about 5 minutes. Top with remaining feta, and garnish with sour cream before serving.

Mititei

(Grilled Sausages)

SERVES 6–8

Small skinless sausages like these (pictured top left) are cooked on charcoal grills in Romania and in other parts of eastern Europe and the Balkans. Fragrant with garlic, paprika, and caraway, the Roma-

- pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ½ cup flour
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
- 2 red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 2 ribs celery, finely chopped
- 1 large carrot, finely chopped
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 red Holland chile, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 3 cups chicken stock

nian version, called *mititei*, or “wee ones,” are delicious served with zesty mustard.

- 2 lb. ground pork
- 2 tbsp. olive oil, plus more for brushing
- 2 tbsp. hot paprika
- 1 tbsp. plus 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 2 tsp. dried thyme
- 2 tsp. caraway seeds
- 2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1½ tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 9 cloves garlic, minced

1 Mix all ingredients in a medium bowl until evenly combined, and form into about twenty-two 3”-long, ¾”-thick wide sausages.

2 Heat a cast-iron grill pan or skillet over medium-high heat, and brush with oil. (Alternatively, arrange an oven rack 4” from broiler and heat broiler to high.) Working in batches, add sausages, and cook, turning once, until lightly charred in spots and cooked through about 5 minutes. (Alternatively, place sausages on a foil-lined baking sheet, and broil, turning once, until lightly charred and cooked through.)

Prăjitură Cu Caise

(Apricot Cake)

SERVES 12

This simple sour cream cake (pictured on [page 50](#)) is brightened by lemon zest and dotted with ripe apricot halves that cook down to intense tangy sweetness in the oven.

- 2¾ cups flour, plus more for pan
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 1½ cups plus 1 tbsp. sugar for sprinkling
- 1 tsp. lemon zest
- 4 eggs
- ¾ cup canola oil
- ¾ cup sour cream
- ½ cup milk
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 6 apricots (about 1½ lb.), halved and pitted

Heat oven to 350°. Grease and flour a 9” x 13” baking pan; set aside. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a bowl; set aside. In a large bowl, beat 1½ cups sugar, zest, and eggs on medium-high speed of a mixer until pale and tripled in volume, about 5 minutes. Add oil, sour cream, milk, and vanilla, and beat until smooth. Add dry ingredients, and stir just until combined. Pour batter into prepared pan and smooth top with a rubber spatula; place apricot halves, cut sides up, evenly over batter. Sprinkle top of cake and apricots with remaining

sugar, and bake until a toothpick inserted into middle of cake comes out clean, about 45 minutes. Let cool and slice into squares to serve.

Secărică

(Caraway Brandy)

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

In Transylvania, it’s not unusual to be offered a shot of homemade brandy as a gesture of hospitality upon arriving at a home or guest house. This one has a spicy caraway flavor that balances nicely with the rich walnut cake pictured on the opposite page (see [page 50](#) for a recipe).

- ¼ cup caraway seeds
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 1 750-milliliter bottle brandy

1 Using a mortar and pestle or the bottom of a glass measuring cup on a cutting board, lightly crush and bruise the caraway seeds until fragrant. Using a funnel, transfer seeds and sugar to the bottle of brandy, and seal. Let sit at room temperature, shaking the bottle every few days, for 1 month.

2 Pour brandy through a cheesecloth-lined strainer into a large glass measuring cup, and discard solids; clean bottle and return brandy to bottle, and seal. Serve right away or chill.

Supă Cu Găluște

(Chicken Soup with Semolina Dumplings)

SERVES 6

Airy semolina dumplings bob in the fragrant, paprika- and caraway-spiced broth of this warming chicken soup (pictured on [page 45](#)), along with tender chunks of carrot, parsnip, and celery.

- ½ cup semolina flour
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 medium yellow onion, ¼ grated, ¾ finely chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 8 oz. bone-in, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 tbsp. paprika
- ½ tsp. caraway seeds
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 medium carrots, halved lengthwise and cut into ¼”-thick slices
- 1 medium parsnip, halved lengthwise and cut into ¼”-thick slices
- 1 rib celery, cut crosswise into ¼”-thick slices
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste
- 6 cups chicken stock
- 6 canned whole, peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped parsley

1 Combine semolina, eggs, grated

onion, and salt and pepper in a medium bowl until evenly combined; let sit until thickened, about 5 minutes. Using two small spoons, form dough into about nine 2”-long football-shaped dumplings; transfer to a piece of parchment paper, and set aside.

2 Heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Season chicken with salt and pepper. Working in batches, add to pan, and cook, turning once, until chicken has browned on both sides, about 12 minutes. Transfer chicken to a plate and set aside. Add remaining finely chopped onion to pan along with paprika, caraway, garlic, carrots, parsnip, and celery, and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 8 minutes. Add tomato paste, and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 2 minutes. Return chicken to pan, and add stock and tomatoes; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until chicken is cooked through, about 30 minutes.

3 Remove pan from heat, and transfer chicken to a plate. Let cool slightly, and then shred chicken from bones; discard bones, and return chicken to pan. Return pan to heat and return to a simmer; add dumplings, and cook, covered, until dumplings are cooked through, about 2 minutes. To serve, ladle soup and dumplings into bowls, and garnish with parsley.

Székelyalmás

(Pork with Apples and Cider Cream Sauce)

SERVES 6

The recipe for tender slices of pork loin in a sumptuous cream sauce (pictured on [page 46](#)) comes from Gerda Gherghiceanu, a cook in the Saxon village of Viscari. Fragrant with marjoram, a key herb in Saxon cooking, the dish gets tartness from apple cider and apple wedges and a pleasant twinge of heat from red Holland chiles.

- ½ cup olive oil
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1½ lb. pork loin, cut into ¼”-thick slices
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ½ cup flour
- 3 tart apples, such as Granny Smith, peeled, cored, and cut into 8 wedges each
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 large yellow onion, finely chopped
- ½ red Holland chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- 1½ cups regular or hard apple cider
- 1 cup chicken stock

- ½ cup heavy cream
- ¼ cup Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped marjoram
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped parsley
- Cooked white rice, for serving

1 Heat 2 tbsp. each oil and butter in a 12” skillet over medium-high heat. Season pork on both sides with salt and pepper, and dredge half the pieces in flour; add to skillet, and cook, turning once, until lightly browned on both sides, about 1 minute. Transfer to a plate, and set aside; repeat with 2 tbsp. oil, remaining butter, and remaining pork and flour; transfer all pork to plate.

2 Return skillet to heat, and add remaining oil; add apples, garlic, onion, and chile, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 3 minutes. Add cider, and cook until reduced by half, about 5 minutes. Add stock, cream, and mustard, and bring to a boil; return pork to skillet, and add marjoram. Reduce heat to medium, and cook until pork is cooked through and sauce has thickened, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, and sprinkle with parsley; serve with rice.

Tuică de Prune

(Fermented Plum Brandy)

MAKES 3½ CUPS

Fruit-steeped brandies like this one, common throughout Transylvania and Hungary, are easy to make at home: Plums and sugar are simply left to ferment for two weeks, and then infused into brandy.

- 4 lb. ripe plums, halved, pitted, and roughly chopped
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 750-milliliter bottle brandy

1 Combine plums and sugar in a 2-qt. glass jar; using a wooden spoon, crush and stir the plums and sugar together until all the sugar is moistened. Fill a quart-size resealable plastic bag halfway with water, seal it closed, and place it over the fruit; this will keep the fruit submerged as the sugar draws out its juices. Cover the jar with a triple layer of cheesecloth and secure with a rubber band. Let sit at room temperature for 2 weeks to ferment the plums.

2 Uncover and pour the plum liquid through a cheesecloth-lined strainer into a measuring cup; pour same amount of brandy from bottle into another measuring cup and reserve for another use. Pour plum liquid into bottle of brandy and seal. Store in the refrigerator for up to 1 month. This drink can be served right away, but will mellow the longer it sits.



SWEET SOUTHERN DREAMS

Nothing says home to a man from Mississippi like a sky-high layer cake

by Ben Mims photographs by Todd Coleman

Lemon layer cake (see [page 58](#) for a recipe)



Red velvet cake (see [page 58](#) for a recipe)

PRIOR TO OCTOBER 7, 2010, my mother and I were the best of friends. A consummate Southern lady, Judy Mims is a fantastic cook, gossip, and mom—and in her relationship with me she had always drawn on all those talents. But on that October day, I flew from New York City to my childhood home in Kosciusko, Mississippi, to come out, at 25 years old, as a gay man to my parents. As anyone who grew up in the Bible Belt can imagine, the outcome was heartbreaking. My mother and I used to talk at least weekly; now months go by without a call. I miss her. And I can't help feeling like I've lost touch with not only my mother, but also my lifeline to the world I grew up in. Thank goodness I still have the cakes.

Layer cakes originated in the South, and with their over-the-top grandeur and unapologetic sweetness, they're inextricably linked to the culture I grew up in. The drama, excitement, and praise—they all speak to the South.

My childhood in rural Mississippi was filled with fantastic bakers: my mother, of course; her sister, Barbara Jane; my paternal grandmother, Carol; and Mom's friends, those church ladies decked out in hats who produced a never-ending procession of astounding cakes. My grandmother's neighbor Louise Hodges made a cake three yellow layers tall, draped

With their grandeur and unapologetic sweetness, layer cakes are inextricably linked to the culture I grew up in. The drama, excitement, and praise all speak to the South

in warm caramel fudge icing, which exuded a fragrance of vanilla and browned butter that could knock you over. Carol, who bought those cakes from Mrs. Hodges, served one to our family virtually every Sunday after church. We would sometimes have two slices each, and when I'd tease my grandmother, asking her who made the cake, she would primp her curly blonde hair, give me a wink, and reply, "Why, who do you think?"

My mother, for her part, turned out mammoth sour cream Bundt cakes, domed lemon and cream cheese pound cakes, and a ludicrously rich cheesecake that was my staple birthday cake. I spent my childhood at her elbow, watching her pour glaze down the grooved sides of a Bundt cake, mirroring her smile as she passed me a beater with batter barely clinging to it. Unlike Mrs. Hodges, Mom was never big on making layer cakes. Maybe she didn't have the patience to stack and frost all those layers, though she liked them just fine as an effortless treat baked by someone else. The only layer cake in her repertoire was red velvet, for just as most Southern women have a subscription to *Southern Living* magazine and at least one gilded holiday wreath in their attic, most also have a red velvet cake up their sleeve. The deep crimson cake against the luminous white frosting is pure Southern drama. It's Shirley MacLaine in *Steel Magnolias* hacking into the blood-colored tail of an armadillo-shaped groom's cake. It's my mother's ceramic-white skin contrasted by her lips, always burnished with brick-red lipstick.

My mother stacked her red velvet only two layers deep and almost always made it with cream cheese frosting. One Christmas during my teen years, though, she got adventurous with a whipped cream frosting

consisting of cooked flour, sugar, and milk beaten into butter. When executed correctly, a frosting like this holds up like a dream and provides just the right balance—not too sweet or rich—for the slightly acidic, chocolate-flavored red velvet layers. She labored over that cake all day, and we carried it in our car two hours away to my grandfather's house in Holly Springs. After dinner, once the coffee was perking, the cake dome was lifted, and my mom sliced into the scarlet layers and snow-white frosting. Everyone took bites, and then spit them out. The frosting was as chalky and tacky as wallpaper paste; my mom was nearly in tears.

She never tried her hand at it again, but that whipped cream icing had a profound effect on me. Motivated by my mother's failure, I made it my mission to learn how to make the cake she had envisioned. Schooled at her apron strings, I was already an avid baker, and nailing that recipe helped direct my life's path. In my current job, I'm able to hone my skills every day to produce the platonic ideals of the cakes my mother raised me to love.

Some of my best recipes were passed down from my mother's own mother, Jane Newson, who died the year before my birth. The very morning following the red velvet cake disaster, my mother sat with Barbara Jane and me on my grandfather's living room floor and sorted through hundreds of her mother's recipe cards. By all accounts, Jane was a fantastic maker of layer cakes: prune and fig in a cinnamon

meringue; Lane cake filled with boozy nut and raisin custard; walnut spice laden with cinnamon, allspice, and cloves. It was the coconut cake recipe, though, that the sisters agreed was the one to save if ever the house caught on fire. The first time I tried the recipe, it exceeded all my expectations. The cake was filled with freshly grated coconut, the sweet water seeping into the yellow layers surrounded by fluffy Italian meringue. Left for a day to "mature" in the refrigerator, every inch of it was suffused with rich coconut flavor.

Still, of all the Southern layer cakes I have known, the one that sticks with me the most these days is lemon. It goes back to the summer before my senior year of college, when I moved to Vicksburg, home of the Miss Mississippi Pageant, to work as a reporter for *The Vicksburg Post*. Toward the end of my stay, just before the beauty queen pomp began, my mom came to visit, and we took a walk along the riverfront. When we ducked into a little café for coffee, we noticed a case full of beautiful layer cakes. We ordered a pastel-yellow slice of lemon cake to share. It was a stunner: four layers of citrusy butter cake drenched in lemon syrup and enrobed in a lemon buttercream frosting. We sat and chatted, and every bite of cake tingled our cheeks with delicious tartness. Now, whenever I get nostalgic for the South, I break out my cake pans, butter, and sugar, and whip up a lemon cake like the one we shared; it buoys my hope for a future in which my mother and I are as close as we once were. The result—bittersweet and beautiful—reminds me of that afternoon, four years before our lives changed, when we sat together in that café without a care in the world and just talked about cake. 🍌



Walnut spice cake (see [page 59](#) for a recipe)



Caramel cake (see [page 58](#) for a recipe)



Coconut cake (see [page 58](#) for a recipe)

Caramel Cake

SERVES 10-12

The recipe for this butter cake draped in caramel fudge icing (pictured on page 56) is based on a cake originally made by Louise Hodges, a home cook from Carmack, Mississippi.

FOR THE CAKE:

- 16 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pans
- 3 cups cake flour, plus more for pans, sifted
- 2½ tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 cup milk
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1½ cups sugar
- 4 eggs

FOR THE ICING:

- 3½ cups sugar
- 12 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 2 15-oz. cans evaporated milk
- 1 egg
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. baking soda

1 Make the cake: Heat oven to 350°. Butter and flour three 9" cake pans, and set aside. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a bowl; set aside. Whisk together milk and vanilla in a bowl; set aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, cream butter and sugar on medium-high speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. On low speed, alternately add dry ingredients in 3 batches and wet ingredients in 2 batches. Increase speed to high and beat until batter is smooth, about 5 seconds. Divide batter among prepared pans, and smooth top with a rubber spatula; drop pans lightly on a counter to expel any large air bubbles. Bake cakes until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean, about 25 minutes. Let cakes cool for 20 minutes in pans; invert onto wire racks, and let cool.

2 Make the icing and assemble the cake: Whisk together 3 cups sugar, butter, milk, and egg in a 6-qt. copper saucepan or Dutch oven; set aside. Heat remaining sugar in a small skillet over high heat, and cook, swirling pan, until sugar melts into an amber caramel, about 2 minutes. Immediately pour caramel into milk mixture, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat; attach a candy thermometer to side of pan, and cook, stirring bottom constantly with a wooden spoon, until thermometer reads 232°, about 40 minutes. Remove from heat and immediately stir in vanilla and baking soda; let sit for 1 minute. Using a hand mixer, beat caramel mixture on medium-low speed until the consistency of loose pudding, about 1 minute. Immediately place one cake on a cake stand and pour over ½ cup caramel icing; top with second cake

and pour over ½ cup icing. Top with third cake and pour remaining icing around the top edge of cake and then over the center. Quickly spread icing over sides of cake; let icing cool completely before serving. Store at room temperature.

Coconut Cake

SERVES 10-12

Fresh coconut and its sweet water are the keys to this cake (pictured on page 57), passed down from *SAVEUR* associate food editor Ben Mims' grandmother, Jane Newson. A handy rotary coconut grater (see *THE PANTRY*, page 84, for a source) produces snow-like coconut flakes, but a hand grater works well, too.

FOR THE CAKE:

- 16 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pans
- 2½ cups cake flour, plus more for pans, sifted
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- 2 cups sugar
- 5 eggs

FOR THE FROSTING:

- 4 egg whites
- ½ tsp. cream of tartar
- 2¼ cups sugar
- ¼ cup light corn syrup
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¾ cup fresh coconut water
- 3 cups freshly grated coconut

1 Make the cake: Heat oven to 350°. Butter and flour two 9" cake pans, and set aside. Whisk together flour, baking soda, and salt in a bowl; set aside. Whisk together buttermilk and vanilla in a bowl; set aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, cream butter and sugar on medium-high speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. On low speed, alternately add dry ingredients in 3 batches and wet ingredients in 2 batches. Increase speed to high, and beat until batter is smooth, about 5 seconds. Divide batter between prepared pans, and smooth top with a rubber spatula; drop pans lightly on a counter to expel large air bubbles. Bake cakes until a toothpick inserted in middle comes out clean, about 35 minutes. Let cakes cool for 20 minutes in pans; invert onto wire racks, and let cool. Using a serrated knife, halve each cake horizontally, producing four layers; set aside.

2 Make the frosting: Place egg whites and cream of tartar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a whisk, and beat on medium-high speed until soft peaks form; turn mixer off. Bring sugar, syrup, salt, and ½ cup tap water to a boil in a 2-qt.

saucepan over high heat, stirring to dissolve sugar; attach a candy thermometer to side of pan, and cook, without stirring, until thermometer reads 250°, 4-5 minutes. Turn mixer to medium speed, and very slowly drizzle hot syrup into beating egg whites. Add vanilla, and increase speed to high; beat until meringue forms stiff peaks and is slightly warm to the touch, about 3 minutes.

3 To assemble, place one layer on a cake stand, drizzle with 3 tbsp. coconut water, spread with 1½ cups frosting, and sprinkle with ½ cup grated coconut; top with another cake, drizzle with 3 tbsp. coconut water, spread with 1½ cups frosting, and sprinkle with ½ cup coconut. Place another cake over frosting, drizzle with 3 tbsp. coconut water, spread with 1½ cups frosting, and sprinkle with ½ cup coconut; top with remaining cake and drizzle with remaining coconut water. Cover top and sides with remaining frosting, and cover outside of cake with remaining coconut, pressing it lightly to adhere; chill cake to firm frosting. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

Lemon Layer Cake

SERVES 10-12

Lemon infuses this layered masterpiece in three ways: zested into the batter, in a tart syrup that gets drizzled over the cakes, and in a thick lemon curd frosting (pictured on page 52).

FOR THE CAKE AND SYRUP:

- 16 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pans
- 2½ cups cake flour, plus more for pans, sifted
- 2½ tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- ½ cup milk
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1¾ cups sugar
- 1 tbsp. lemon zest
- 4 eggs
- ½ cup fresh lemon juice

FOR THE FROSTING:

- 1½ cups sugar
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ¼ cup lemon zest
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 10 egg yolks
- 1 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1½ cups unsalted butter, softened
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract

1 Make the cake: Heat oven to 350°. Butter and flour two 9" cake pans, and set aside. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a bowl; set aside. Whisk together milk and vanilla in a bowl; set aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, cream butter, 1½ cups sugar, and zest on medium-high speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. On low speed,

alternately add dry ingredients in 3 batches and wet ingredients in 2 batches. Increase speed to high and beat until batter is smooth, about 5 seconds. Divide batter between prepared pans, and smooth top with a rubber spatula; drop pans lightly on a counter to expel any large air bubbles. Bake cakes until a toothpick inserted in middle comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Let cakes cool for 20 minutes in pans; invert onto wire racks, and let cool. Using a serrated knife, halve each cake horizontally to produce four layers; set aside. Bring remaining sugar and juice to a boil in a small saucepan over high heat. Remove from heat, and set syrup aside.

2 Make the frosting: Whisk together sugar, cornstarch, zest, and salt in a 4-qt. saucepan. Add yolks, and whisk until smooth; stir in juice. Stirring often, bring to a boil over medium heat; cook, stirring constantly, until very thick, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat, let cool, and transfer to a bowl; chill the lemon curd. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, beat butter and ¼ of the curd on medium-high speed until fluffy and smooth, about 1 minute. Add half the remaining curd, beating until smooth, and then add remaining curd and vanilla. Increase speed to high; beat frosting until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes.

3 To assemble, place one cake layer on a cake stand, drizzle with 2 tbsp. syrup, and spread with ¾ cup frosting; top with another cake, drizzle with 2 tbsp. syrup, and spread with ¾ cup frosting. Place another cake over the frosting, drizzle with 2 tbsp. syrup, and spread with ¾ cup frosting; top with remaining cake, and drizzle with remaining syrup. Cover top and sides with remaining frosting; chill cake to firm frosting. Serve at room temperature.

Red Velvet Cake

SERVES 10-12

Though cream cheese frosting is typically used nowadays on red velvet cake (pictured on page 53), classic whipped cream frosting makes for a more balanced sweetness.

FOR THE CAKE:

- 16 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pans
- 2½ cups cake flour, plus more for pans, sifted
- 2 tbsp. Dutch-processed cocoa powder, sifted
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2 tbsp. red food coloring
- 1 tbsp. distilled white vinegar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1½ cups sugar
- 2 eggs

FOR THE FROSTING:

- 1½ cups sugar
- ⅓ cup flour
- 1½ cups milk
- 1½ cups unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract

1 Make the cake: Heat oven to 350°. Butter and flour two 8" cake pans, and set aside. Whisk together flour, cocoa, baking powder, and salt in a bowl; set aside. Whisk together buttermilk, food coloring, vinegar, and vanilla in a bowl; set aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, cream butter and sugar on medium-high speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. On low speed, alternately add dry ingredients in 3 batches and wet ingredients in 2 batches. Increase speed to high and beat until batter is smooth, about 5 seconds. Divide batter between prepared pans, and smooth top with a rubber spatula; drop pans lightly on a counter to expel any large air bubbles. Bake cakes until a toothpick inserted in middle comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Let cakes cool for 20 minutes in pans; invert onto wire racks, and let cool.

2 Make the frosting and assemble cake: Whisk together sugar and flour in a 4-qt. saucepan; add milk and whisk until smooth. Stirring often, bring to a boil over medium-high heat; cook, stirring constantly, until very thick, about 5 minutes. Remove pudding from heat; cool. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, beat butter and ¼ of the pudding on medium-high speed until fluffy and smooth, about 1 minute. Add half the remaining pudding, beating until smooth, and then add remaining pudding and vanilla. Increase speed to high and beat frosting until white and fluffy, about 3 minutes. To assemble, place one cake on a cake stand, and spread with 1½ cups frosting. Place second cake over frosting; cover top and sides with remaining frosting; chill to firm frosting. Serve at room temperature.

Walnut Spice Cake

SERVES 10-12

For this striking two-toned dessert (pictured on page 55), alternating layers of snow-white and mahogany-brown spiced cakes are sandwiched with a rich, chocolate fudge icing and decorated with walnut halves.

FOR THE CAKE:

- 1 cup vegetable shortening, plus more for pans
- 3 cups cake flour, plus more for pans, sifted
- 2½ tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 cup milk
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ground allspice

- ½ tsp. ground cloves
- 2 cups sugar
- 6 egg whites, at room temperature

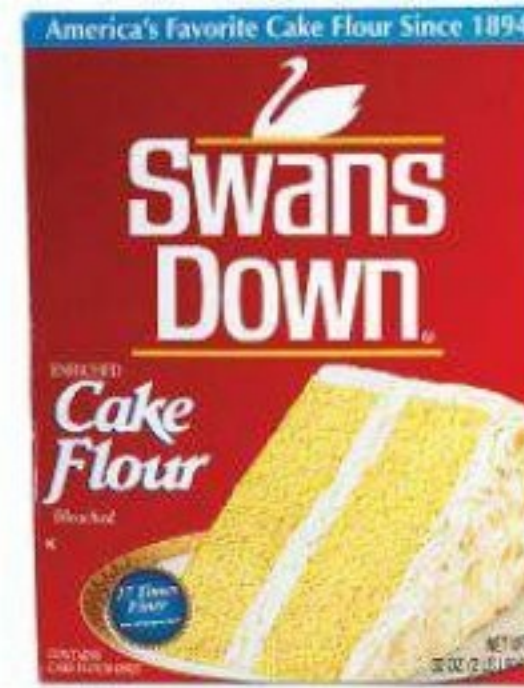
FOR THE ICING:

- 4 cups sugar
- 3 cups milk
- 12 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- ⅓ cup Dutch-processed cocoa powder, sifted
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 2 cups whole walnut halves

1 Make the cake: Heat oven to 350°. Grease and flour two 9" cake pans, and set aside. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a bowl; set aside. Whisk together milk and vanilla in a bowl; set aside. In a small bowl, whisk together cinnamon, allspice, and cloves; set spices aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, cream shortening and sugar on medium-high speed until evenly combined, about 2 minutes. Add egg whites one at a time, beating well after each addition. On low speed, alternately add dry ingredients in 3 batches and wet ingredients in 2 batches. Increase speed to high and beat until batter is smooth, about 5 seconds. Pour half the batter into one prepared pan. Add spices to remaining batter in bowl; stir until evenly combined. Pour spiced batter into second prepared pan; smooth tops of both batters with a rubber spatula. Drop pans lightly on a counter to expel any large air bubbles. Bake cakes until a toothpick inserted in middle comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Let cakes cool for 20 minutes in pans; invert onto wire racks, and let cool. Using a serrated knife, halve each cake horizontally to produce four layers; set aside.

2 Make the icing and assemble the cake: Bring sugar, milk, butter, and cocoa to a boil in a 6-qt. copper saucepan or Dutch oven over medium-high heat; attach a candy thermometer to side of pan, and cook, stirring bottom constantly with a wooden spoon, until thermometer reads 232°, about 30 minutes. Remove from heat and immediately stir in vanilla and baking soda; let sit for 1 minute. Using a hand mixer, beat chocolate mixture on medium-low speed until the consistency of loose pudding, about 1 minute. Immediately place one spiced cake layer on a cake stand and pour ½ cup chocolate icing over; top with one white cake and pour ½ cup icing over. Place second spiced cake over icing and pour ½ cup icing over; top with second white cake, and pour remaining icing around top edge of cake and then over the center. Quickly spread icing over sides of cakes; press walnuts into sides of cake until sides are covered. Let icing cool completely before serving. Store at room temperature.

4 Cake Tips



1. All-purpose flour isn't really made for every purpose. For the best results when baking a cake, you need to use cake flour, a finely milled and typically bleached variety of flour made from soft winter wheat. With a lower content of gluten-producing proteins than in all-purpose flour—around 7 percent versus 10 percent to 12 percent—cake flour yields baked goods with a fine, soft texture. The bleaching process also raises the acidity of the batter, which allows the starch in the flour to absorb more moisture, further enhancing the cake's tenderness. Although cake flour is readily available at grocery stores, in a pinch, you can substitute three-quarters of a cup of all-purpose flour mixed with two tablespoons of cornstarch for each cup of cake flour called for in the recipe.



2. The key to a smooth batter is making sure the milk, butter, and eggs are at room temperature when you mix them into a cake batter. Chilled eggs and milk can harden softened butter when they're mixed in, resulting in a curdled appearance. Whereas butter and milk can be microwaved to soften—a shortcut that works but is not ideal due to the risk of overheating—you can't microwave the eggs without cooking them. Ideally, you should leave the eggs out overnight so that they can come to room temperature naturally. But if you are pressed for time, you can quickly warm up refrigerated eggs by placing them in a bowl of warm tap water. The cold eggs will cool

the water right away, so drain the bowl and refill it with more warm tap water. Let the eggs sit in the water for about five minutes so that they reach the proper temperature before adding to the batter.



3. When it comes time to mix the ingredients, a bit of counter-intuition helps: Most home bakers learn not to beat their batter in order to prevent the formation of gluten, which leads to a tougher crumb. While this may be a concern when using all-purpose flour, cake batter is less prone to gluten production. And beating a cake batter for a short period of time actually helps smooth and aerate it. Once the batter is just mixed, beat it on high speed for five seconds. You will notice that it immediately transforms into a smooth emulsion, ensuring that the ingredients are evenly dispersed.



4. Finally, most bakers dread the random air bubble that wreaks havoc on a sliced cake's appearance. But this type of aesthetic imperfection can be avoided by dropping the pan on a countertop to burst any air bubbles. Once you pour your batter into the pan, smooth its top with a rubber spatula. Next, drop the pan from the height of about a foot onto countertop. The impact of the fall will force large air bubbles out and settle the batter into the pan, producing a more even shape. Only do this for cakes leavened with baking soda or baking powder, however; egg foam cakes, like *genoise*, need their air bubbles in order to rise. —B.M.

Good and Plenty

The colorful array of Venetian bites known as *cicheti* are the best way to sample the city's unique cuisine

BY DANA BOWEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY TODD COLEMAN

THERE'S A MOMENT I CHERISH IN VENICE, when the sun starts to set, the light turns silver, and the city appears more beautiful and improbable than ever. It's the time of day when Venetians are getting off work and their purposeful strides slow down to casual strolls, when the usual sounds of conversation that bounce between the narrow, stone-walled *calli* start concentrating around the city's *bàcari*, or wine bars. That's when I start craving *cicheti*, the colorful small plates these eateries are famous for; the city's signature snacks.

Cicheti is a Venetian thing, and like most things Venetian—water taxis, mind-boggling species of fish, the high-heel wading boots women put on when ankle-deep *acqua alta* (flood waters), rolls in from the lagoon—you don't find them quite like this anywhere else in the world. Delicately seasoned deep-fried rice croquettes; sardines that are lightly fried and marinated with a sweet-sour tangle of caramelized onion; *capasante*, or sea scallops, broiled on the half shell under a blanket of bread crumbs and butter: These foods might very well resemble Spain's tapas or Greece's *mezedes* in their size and variety, and they in fact stem from the same old tradition of offering quick bites while imbibing or doing business, but they belong to no place other than Venice. The foods are bite-size expressions of the local cuisine, and the way you eat them—casually, frequently, not just at dusk as an appetizer, but as a snack between breakfast and lunch, or whenever you run into a friend on the street and decide to catch up over an impromptu meal—are borne out of Venice's uniquely pedestrian way of life. Insular and idiosyncratic, Venice can be a hard city to get to know, but it's when I'm eating *cicheti* that I feel I know it best.

I first encountered *cicheti* before I knew Venice very well. In 2000, I arrived to research a guide book, and one day the owner of my hotel, a sweet woman a few years my senior who had patiently given me directions to all the fancy restaurants I needed to check out, took me to a bar across the street. "I want to show you how Venetians really eat," she said.

I had passed the old-fashioned, wood-trimmed place, and others like it, dozens of times, and had written it off as a watering hole. But once I walked inside and over (continued on [page 64](#))

Cicheti often include emphatically flavored ingredients, like anchovies, which may be stuffed into ❶ sweet-hot peppers. ❷ Classic *baccalà mantecato*, dried cod mousse, is often served over grilled polenta squares and dates to the Middle Ages, as does ❸ *sarde in saor*, sardines marinated with onions, pine nuts, and raisins. A more contemporary take on *cicheti* is flavorful ❹ stuffed zucchini. (See [page 66](#) for recipes.)







Seafood *cicheti* are simple preparations that showcase the flavor and texture of the fish. ❶ Sea scallops are often baked on the half shell under a blanket of bread crumbs, Parmesan, and thyme. ❷ Mussels get a similar treatment, studded with chopped tomatoes and herbs. There are dozens of crustaceans for which the Venetian lagoon is famed; while classic places simply grill them and douse them with olive oil and lemon, ❸ newfangled *cicheti* bars will incorporate seasonings like rosemary and garlic. ❹ Most *bàcari* serve *insalata di polpo*, an octopus salad with parsley and lemon. (See [page 66](#) for recipes.)



Crispy, pleasingly salty, and perfect as bar snacks, fried foods have long been *cicheti* staples. ❶ *Polpette*, the tender meatballs enriched with mashed potatoes and herbs, and ❷ croquettes made of leftover risotto and cheese, are often served a few to an order. When Venice's famed artichokes are in season each spring, they show up at *bàcari* every which way: ❸ Some places wrap them in bacon. And while they're not entirely traditional, other regional Italian snacks like ❹ *mozzarella in carozza* (deep-fried cheese sandwiches) are being embraced by *bàcari*. (See [page 66](#) for recipes.)

(continued from [page 60](#)) to the bar, I could see an expansive array of prepared foods; there were platters that stretched from the front window all the way down to the back room. As the barman fixed a plate with a little bit of everything—a scoop of creamy codfish mousse, a few crisp-fried meatballs, grilled polenta squares—my new friend shared the story of *cicheti*, and of Venice itself.

VENICE, DESPITE THE WAY it may feel during high season, is a small town: Just 60,000 people reside in the old city, which you can walk across from one end to the other in about an hour. In the incomparable book *The World of Venice* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), the travel writer Jan Morris writes that Venice, “compact though the city is, remains crisscrossed with local flavors and loyalties. Each district, each clamorous market square has its own recognizable atmosphere—here harsh, here kindly, here simple, here sophisticated. Even more than London, Venice remains a collection of villages.”

Over the years as I returned to the city, I came to know those villages through their *cicheti*. The unique spirit of each neighborhood, or *sestiere*, shines through in its *bàcari*, and the different kinds of snacks they serve. There are places around the Rialto bridge, where *cicheti* likely originated as a quick meal that catered to the original merchants of Venice, that still look as they did 500 years ago; workingmen’s bars that serve simple snacks like pieces of cheese on toothpicks, fried olives, and *musetto*, Venice’s soft, mild sausage. And there are trendy places in residential neighborhoods that serve inspired, cheffy riffs on *cicheti* classics.

The word *cicheti* is Venetian dialect: Some think it stems from the French word *chiquer*, “to chew”; others believe its root is the Latin *ciccus*, meaning “trifle.” Servings of *cicheti* usually cost no more than a euro or two, but the dishes speak to the city’s rich history as a culinary crossroads, when trade on the Grand Canal brought spices and exotic ingredients from all over the world. No dish represents this more than *baccalà mantecato*, a purée of dried, imported codfish (similar to the French *brandade de morue*) that has been rehydrated, boiled, then whipped with olive oil (purists never add cream) until light and airy. While *cicheti* is, first and foremost, food that Venetians eat outside the home, *baccalà mantecato*

is the kind of traditional dish that home cooks take pride in making: Every Venetian I know has their own version that they dollop on grilled polenta squares. Fine white polenta, made from a fair-kerneled corn that is planted in the area, is most traditional; while the coarser and corny yellow polenta is the norm elsewhere, Venetians’ taste for the refined white variety stretches back to the days of the Doges, the rulers of the Venetian Republic from the Middle Ages through the end of the 18th century.

Another classic *cicheti* is *sarde in saor*, a legacy of Venice’s seafaring tradition. Sardines, which are plentiful in the lagoon, the brackish body of water that surrounds the city, were traditionally fried and marinated with onions so they’d keep for long journeys by boat. Over

The dishes cost just a few euros each, but they speak to Venice’s rich history as a culinary crossroads

time, they became a *cicheti* staple because they don’t require refrigeration. As humble as the dish is, it’s my favorite way to eat the fish, meaty and rich in its sweet-sour, aromatic marinade. It’s often flavored with pine nuts and sultanas, and sometimes even cinnamon and saffron, vestiges of the city’s storied spice trade. Other *cicheti* favorites include *insalata di polpo*, or marinated octopus, bright with parsley and lemon juice, and all manner of fried foods, from battered zucchini to tiny softshell crabs called *moleche*—frying being another method of preserving foods so they’ll keep at room temperature on the bar.

As a cook, I love how *cicheti* speak to the seasons: You can always count on the local produce for sale at the Rialto market show-

ing up simply prepared on *cicheti* bars. The beautiful artichokes from the nearby island of San Erasmo might end up fried, or marinated, or wrapped with pancetta and broiled. Peppers are stuffed with anchovies and preserved *sott’olio*, in olive oil; radicchio is sliced into wedges and grilled. *Tramezzini*, the Venetian triangles of squishy, crustless white bread that stem from the English tea sandwich tradition and appeared in northern Italy in the 1920s, are a canvas for all kinds of seasonal produce, with fillings like arugula, asparagus, and more.

The same is true for seafood: One summer day, long after that first trip to Venice, I went out with friends on their boat and harvested *garusoli*, Venetian whelks, from the sandy bottom of the lagoon. Later that night I saw the seasonal shellfish at a *bàcaro* simply dressed. To me, there’s no finer way to appreciate Venice’s pristine seafood than to eat it as *cicheti*. I’ll order a serving of *granseola* (spider crab), the meat, plucked from its shell and seasoned with its buttery orange roe, or a few of the many varieties of lagoon crustaceans: tiny brown shrimp called *schie* that are fried or boiled and served with polenta; *scampi*, the pink, impossibly sweet crayfish; and my absolute favorite, meaty, nutty-tasting *canoce*, or mantis shrimp, grilled and charged with lemon.

All of these foods go best with local wine—a rustic red *refosco*, say, or a bracingly crisp Soave—in a glass big enough for just a few gulps called *un’ombra*, itself a centuries-old tradition. *Ombra* is the Italian word for shadow: The city’s wine merchants used to sell their wares in Piazza San Marco, moving throughout the day under the shadow of the campanile, or bell tower, to keep their wine cool. The other classic *cicheti* companion is a refreshing cocktail called a *spritz* (pronounced “spriss”), which Venetians adapted from an Austrian drink of sparkling water and white wine, by adding a touch of bitter Campari or sweeter Aperol.

The beauty of the *ombra* and the “spriss” is that they are designed to be light and restorative and fun, like *cicheti* are. Come dusk, whether I’m parked at a table along the Grand Canal, watching that gorgeous silver light on the proud, old crumbling palazzi as I nosh on *cicheti*, or in my kitchen at home in New York preparing these small plates for family and friends, there’s no better way to enjoy Venice’s singular cuisine. 🍷

Tramezzini, the elegant snacks made on soft white bread with the crusts removed, are the northern Italian equivalent to English tea sandwiches and have taken on a life of their own in Venice. Cafés and *bàcari* serve versions layered with seasonal ingredients and classic combinations, including ❶ arugula with Parmesan cheese and the air-dried beef known as *bresaola* ❷ steamed asparagus with hard-boiled eggs and tomato, and ❸ tuna studded with olives and capers. (See [page 67](#) for recipes.)





Arancini Veneziani

(Venetian Rice Fritters)

SERVES 6-8

These cheesy rice fritters (pictured on page 63) are an addictive snack, often made with leftover risotto.

- 6 cups chicken stock
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 small yellow onion, minced
- 1½ cups arborio rice
- ½ cup white wine
- 4 oz. prosciutto, minced
- 4 oz. fresh mozzarella, minced
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan
- ½ cup finely chopped parsley
- ¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Canola oil, for frying
- ½ cup flour
- 4 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1½ cups plain bread crumbs

1 Heat stock in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium heat; keep warm. Heat butter in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Add garlic and onion; cook until soft, about 8 minutes. Add rice; cook, stirring, until lightly toasted, about 2 minutes. Add wine; cook until evaporated, about 1 minute. Add ½ cup stock; cook, stirring often, until liquid is absorbed. Repeat until all stock is used and rice is tender, about 40 minutes. Transfer to a bowl; stir in prosciutto, mozzarella, Parmesan, parsley, nutmeg, and salt and pepper. Using wet hands, shape rice mixture into about fifty 1½" logs; transfer to a parchment paper-lined baking sheet, and chill.

2 Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. Dutch oven; heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Place flour, eggs, and bread crumbs in three separate shallow bowls. Working in batches, dredge logs in flour, coat in eggs, and coat in bread crumbs; fry until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Drain on paper towels.

Baccalà Mantecato

(Grilled Polenta with Dried Cod Mousse)

SERVES 10-12

This creamy codfish mousse is delicious served with char-grilled squares of polenta (pictured on page 61).

- 10 oz. dried salt cod
- 4 cups milk
- 1 medium yellow onion, halved
- 1 rib celery, halved
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- ½ cup olive oil, plus more
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1½ cups quick-cooking polenta
- 24 small leaves radicchio
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped parsley

1 Place cod in a 2-qt. saucepan, and cover by 2" with cold water; boil for 20 minutes. Drain cod, return to saucepan, and repeat process

twice more. Transfer cod to a 6-qt. saucepan and add milk, onion, celery, garlic, and 10 cups water; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook until cod is tender, about 20 minutes. Drain cod, reserving ¼ cup cooking liquid; discard vegetables and skin and bones from cod. Process cod and cooking liquid in a food processor until smooth. While processor is running, drizzle in ½ cup oil; continue mixing until smooth. Transfer to a bowl and season with salt and pepper; chill cod mousse.

2 Meanwhile, bring 4 cups salted water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over high heat; while whisking, add polenta, and cook, stirring, until thick, 3-5 minutes. Transfer to a greased 12" x 9" rimmed baking sheet; smooth top and chill until set. Heat a cast-iron grill pan over high heat. Cut polenta into eighteen 2" x 3" rectangles; brush with more oil. Working in batches, grill polenta, turning once, until slightly charred, about 4 minutes. Top each rectangle with radicchio and a dollop of cod mousse; sprinkle with parsley.

Cappesante al Forno

(Baked Scallops with Parmesan)

SERVES 8-10

Sea scallops on the half shell (pictured on page 62) are seasoned with herbs and a dusting of Parmesan.

- 8 diver scallops
- 8 scallop shells
- 2 tbsp. grated Parmesan
- 1½ tbsp. plain bread crumbs
- 1½ tbsp. olive oil
- 3 sprigs thyme, stemmed
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Heat broiler to high. Put scallops in shells; place on baking sheet; stir together Parmesan, bread crumbs, oil, thyme, and salt and pepper, and divide among scallops. Broil until browned, about 3 minutes.

Cozze al Pomodoro

(Stuffed Mussels)

SERVES 4-6

Thyme and white wine bring out the sweet flavor of mussels in these popular *cicheti* (pictured on page 62).

- 30 mussels, steamed open
- ¾ cup white wine
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan
- ¼ cup bread crumbs
- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 3 tbsp. thyme leaves
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 medium tomato, cored, seeded, and finely chopped

Heat broiler to high. Remove and discard top shells from mussels; transfer to a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle wine and oil over mussels; mix Parmesan, bread crumbs, but-

A Cicheti Tour

In the early evening, Venetians venture out on a *giro di ombre*, or a tour of the local bars and eateries, for *cicheti* and the tiny glasses of wine known as *ombre*, stopping off at a few places that specialize in different foods. For example, **1** Ai Promessi Sposi (Calle dell' Oca 4367, Cannaregio; 39/041/241-2747), a restaurant that has excelled in *cicheti* for decades, does a superb job with fried foods: Their *polpette*, the classic Venetian deep-fried meatballs made with beef and potatoes, are the best I've tasted; they also do beautifully seasoned stuffed sardines, and when artichokes are in season, fried artichoke hearts (*fondi di carciofi*). Also in the neighborhood of Cannaregio, near the main artery Strada Nova, is **2** Ca' D'Oro Alla Vedova, (Ramo Ca' D'Oro 3912, Cannaregio; 39/041/528-5324). Their small *cicheti* case is my go-to spot for excellent fish: tiny grilled *seppia*, or cuttlefish; perfectly grilled *canoce* and other crustaceans seasoned simply with lemon and salt. They also make sumptuous marinated sardines, *sarde in saor*, and vegetable *cicheti*, like *cipolline in agrodolce* (sweet and sour onions). Near the San Polo side of the Rialto bridge, **3** Cantina Do Mori (Calle dei do Mori 429, San Polo; 39/041/522-5401) is a classic spot that claims to be the oldest *bàcaro* in Venice, dating to the 1400s. The selection of *cicheti*

is expansive, ranging from *crostini* topped with ingredients like anchovies and salami to creamy *baccalà mantecato*, the whipped cod *cicheto*, served with grilled white polenta squares; and *tramezzini* sandwiches with a diverse selection of fillings. The wines include glasses of rustic *vini* from the Veneto region for just a few euros, as well as pricier regional Italian wines. At sunset, there's no place I'd rather be than **4** Banco-giro (Campo San Giacometto 122, San Polo; 39/041/523-2061), soaking up the view of the Grand Canal with



a *spritz* in hand (pictured below) and a plate of their creative *cicheti* and salumi and cheese plates. The best selection of *cicheti* I have ever encountered wasn't in the old city, but in Mestre, the mainland suburb where most Venetians live. It's well worth the 10-minute train ride to visit brothers Luca and Fabrizio Zanetti's Hostaria Vite Rossa (Via Bembo 34, Mestre; 39/041/531-4421), a 15-year-old place (pictured above, but not shown on map) that features upward of 50 different kinds of *cicheti* daily, including all the standards as well as delicious snacks like *mozzarella in carozza*, the deep-fried cheese sandwiches, and leeks wrapped in pancetta. Like many young osteria owners, they're reclaiming the *cicheti* tradition in exciting new ways. —Dana Bowen



ter, thyme, and salt and pepper, and divide among mussels. Broil until stuffing is golden brown, about 2 minutes. Serve warm, drizzled with pan juices and topped with tomatoes.

Fondi di Carciofi

(Bacon-Wrapped Artichokes)

SERVES 6-8

These artichoke hearts wrapped in bacon (pictured on page 63) were inspired by *cicheti* served at Hosteria Vite Rossa in Venice's Mestre area.

- Canola oil, for frying
- 2 14-oz. jars artichoke hearts
- 8 slices bacon, halved crosswise
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup freshly grated Parmesan
- 1 tbsp. ground black pepper

Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. Dutch oven; heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Place each artichoke heart on one end of a bacon slice, sprinkle with some of the Parmesan and pepper, and roll up; secure with a toothpick. Fry until golden brown, about 3 minutes. Drain.

Gamberi al Rosmarino

(Shrimp with Pancetta and Rosemary)

SERVES 4-6

Serve these garlicky shrimp (pictured on page 62) with lots of crusty bread.

- 8 oz. pancetta, finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 16 medium shrimp, deveined
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup white wine
- 2 sprigs rosemary, stemmed
- 1 medium tomato, cored, seeded, and finely chopped
- Crusty bread, for serving

Heat pancetta and oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat; cook until crisp, 6-8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer pancetta to a plate. Add garlic to skillet; cook for 1 minute. Season shrimp with salt and pepper; add to skillet. Cook until pink, about 2 minutes. Add wine, rosemary, and tomato; cook until wine is reduced by half, 2-3 minutes. Sprinkle with pancetta.

Insalata di Polpo

(Octopus Salad)

SERVES 6

Tender boiled octopus brightened with a lemony dressing (pictured on page 62) is a Venetian *cicheti* staple.

- 4 lb. cleaned frozen octopus, thawed and rinsed
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups olive oil
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup kosher salt, plus more
- 6 tbsp. crushed red chile flakes
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup finely chopped parsley
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 rib celery, minced
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Place octopus, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, salt, and chile flakes in an 8-qt. saucepan, cover with water by 1", and boil; cook until tender, 2-3 hours. Drain octopus; discard head, and peel off skin. Cut tentacles into 1" pieces. Transfer to a bowl; toss with remaining oil, parsley, garlic, celery, juice, and salt and pepper. Cover; let sit for 1 hour to blend flavors.

Mozzarella in Carozza

(Fried Mozzarella Sandwiches)

SERVES 4

These crisp mini-sandwiches (pictured on page 63) are deep-fried and filled with molten cheese.

- Canola oil, for frying
- 6 oz. sliced mozzarella
- 8 slices white sandwich bread
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 cup plain bread crumbs

Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. Dutch oven; heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Divide mozzarella slices among 4 slices bread; season with salt and pepper, and cover with remaining slices to make 4 sandwiches. Trim crusts; halve sandwiches diagonally. Place flour, eggs, and bread crumbs in three separate bowls. Dredge sandwiches in flour, coat in eggs, and coat in bread crumbs; fry until golden brown, about 2 minutes.

Peperoni con Acciughe

(Stuffed Cherry Peppers)

SERVES 10-12

Capers, tuna, and anchovies balance the heat in these small, stuffed cherry peppers (pictured on page 60).

- 5 oz. canned tuna in olive oil, drained
- 8 anchovies in oil, drained
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups extra-virgin olive oil
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plain bread crumbs
- 2 tbsp. capers, minced
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped parsley
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 32-oz. jar red, hot cherry peppers, drained, rinsed, and stemmed (jar reserved)

Finely chop tuna and anchovies; mix with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, bread crumbs, capers, parsley, and salt and pepper in a bowl; stuff each pepper with tuna mixture. Transfer to reserved jar; pour remaining oil over peppers. Chill for at least 8 hours to marinate.

Polpette

(Meat Croquettes)

MAKES 30

Made with ground veal and potatoes, these are a classic Venetian *cicheti* (pictured on page 63).

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk
- 2 slices white sandwich bread

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. ground veal or pork
- 2 cups mashed potatoes
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup finely chopped parsley
- 8 eggs
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Canola oil, for frying
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
- 1 cup plain bread crumbs

Pour milk over bread in a bowl; let soak for 10 minutes. Squeeze bread to drain milk; discard milk. Place bread in a bowl and mix with veal, potatoes, parsley, 4 eggs, garlic, and salt and pepper. Shape mixture into about thirty 1" balls; place on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet, and chill. Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. Dutch oven; heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Place flour, remaining eggs, lightly beaten, and bread crumbs in three separate bowls. Working in batches, dredge each meatball in flour, coat in eggs, and coat in bread crumbs; fry until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Drain on paper towels.

Sarde in Saor

(Sweet and Sour Sardines)

SERVES 6

These sumptuous *cicheti* (pictured on page 60) are traditionally made with fried sardines, but they're just as delicious when the fish are broiled.

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup white wine
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup raisins
- 2 lb. sardines, cleaned
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup olive oil
- 1 large white onion, sliced thin
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup white wine vinegar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup pine nuts

1 Combine wine and raisins in a bowl. Soak for 30 minutes; drain, and set aside. Meanwhile, heat broiler to high. Season sardines with salt and pepper on a baking sheet. Broil, until cooked, about 2 minutes; cool.

2 Heat oil in a 4-qt. pan over medium-high heat. Add onion; cook until browned, 10-12 minutes. Add vinegar, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook until soft, 6-8 minutes. Stir in raisins, nuts, and salt and pepper; let cool. Place half the sardines on bottom of an 8" x 8" dish; cover with half the onion. Place remaining sardines on top; cover with onion. Marinate in refrigerator for 4 hours.

Tramezzini

(Venetian Tea Sandwiches)

SERVES 4

Our favorite fillings for Venetian tea sandwiches (pictured on page 65) are asparagus and eggs, tuna and olives, and arugula with cured beef.

- 12 slices white sandwich bread
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup mayonnaise

- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 5 oz. canned tuna in olive oil, drained and flaked
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup pitted black olives, halved
- 2 tsp. capers, rinsed
- 6 asparagus spears, blanched and halved lengthwise
- 2 hard-boiled eggs, sliced
- 1 medium tomato, cored, sliced
- 6 oz. thinly sliced bresaola
- 2 oz. thinly shaved Parmesan
- 1 cup baby arugula leaves

Remove crusts from bread and spread 1 tbsp. mayonnaise over each slice; season with salt and pepper. Layer tuna, olives, and capers over 2 slices; layer asparagus, eggs, and tomato over 2 slices; and layer bresaola, Parmesan, and arugula over 2 slices. Top each with a slice of bread; halve sandwiches diagonally.

Zucchini Ripiene

(Stuffed Zucchini)

SERVES 6

Zucchini forms the base of many *cicheti*, including this one (pictured on page 61), stuffed with prosciutto, tomatoes, and cheese.

- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup milk
- 1 slice white sandwich bread
- 4 medium zucchini, trimmed, cut into $1\frac{1}{2}$ " lengths
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 cup canned whole, peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 4 oz. prosciutto, minced
- 1 oz. pancetta, minced
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup freshly grated Parmesan
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped parsley
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp. thinly sliced basil

1 Heat oven to 400°. In a bowl, pour milk over bread; soak for 10 minutes. Squeeze bread to drain milk; discard milk. Return bread to bowl.

2 Using a melon baller, hollow out zucchini pieces, leaving $\frac{1}{4}$ " walls, to form "cups"; season insides with salt and pepper. Stir together tomatoes, 2 tbsp. oil, chile flakes, garlic, and salt and pepper in a bowl; set sauce aside.

3 Mix bread with prosciutto, pancetta, Parmesan, parsley, egg, and salt and pepper. Stuff mixture evenly among zucchini cups. Heat remaining oil and butter in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add cups; cook, turning once, until browned on both sides, 2-4 minutes. Transfer cups, stuffing side up, to a 9" x 9" baking dish; pour sauce over and around cups. Bake until zucchini is tender, about 30 minutes. Sprinkle with basil.

A recipe for spritz, Venice's classic cocktail, at saveur.com/spritz



THE LA BREAK SPI

Iran's ancient cuisine is as co

by ANISSA HELOU photo

Top row, from left: a cook preparing a mosque meal in Isfahan; *kufteh*, herb meatballs in a tomato-plum sauce; a street in Tehran; *ash-e reshteh*, noodle soups, at a Tehran cafe. Middle row: The late Minou Saberi (left), and Maryam Khanum,



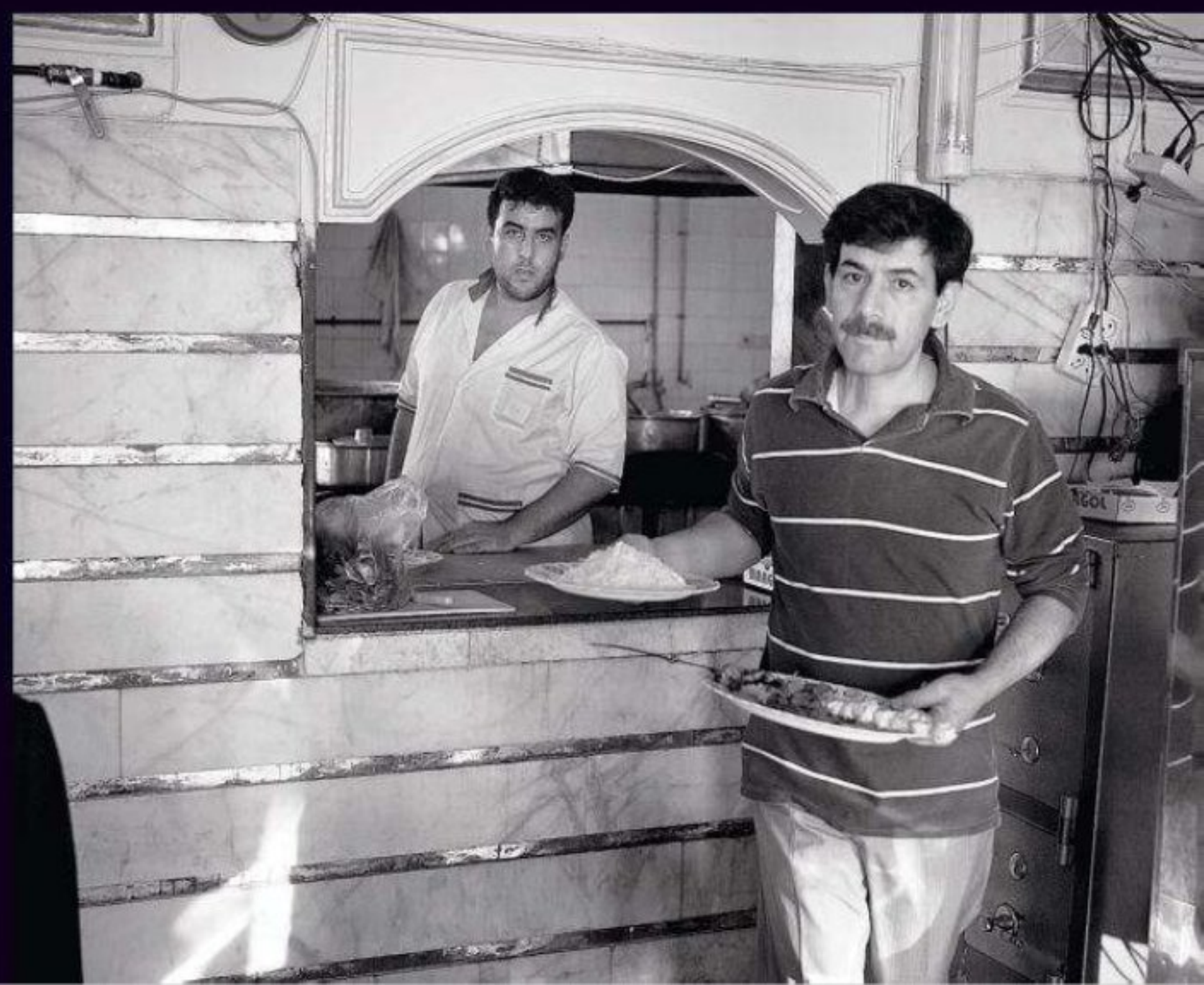
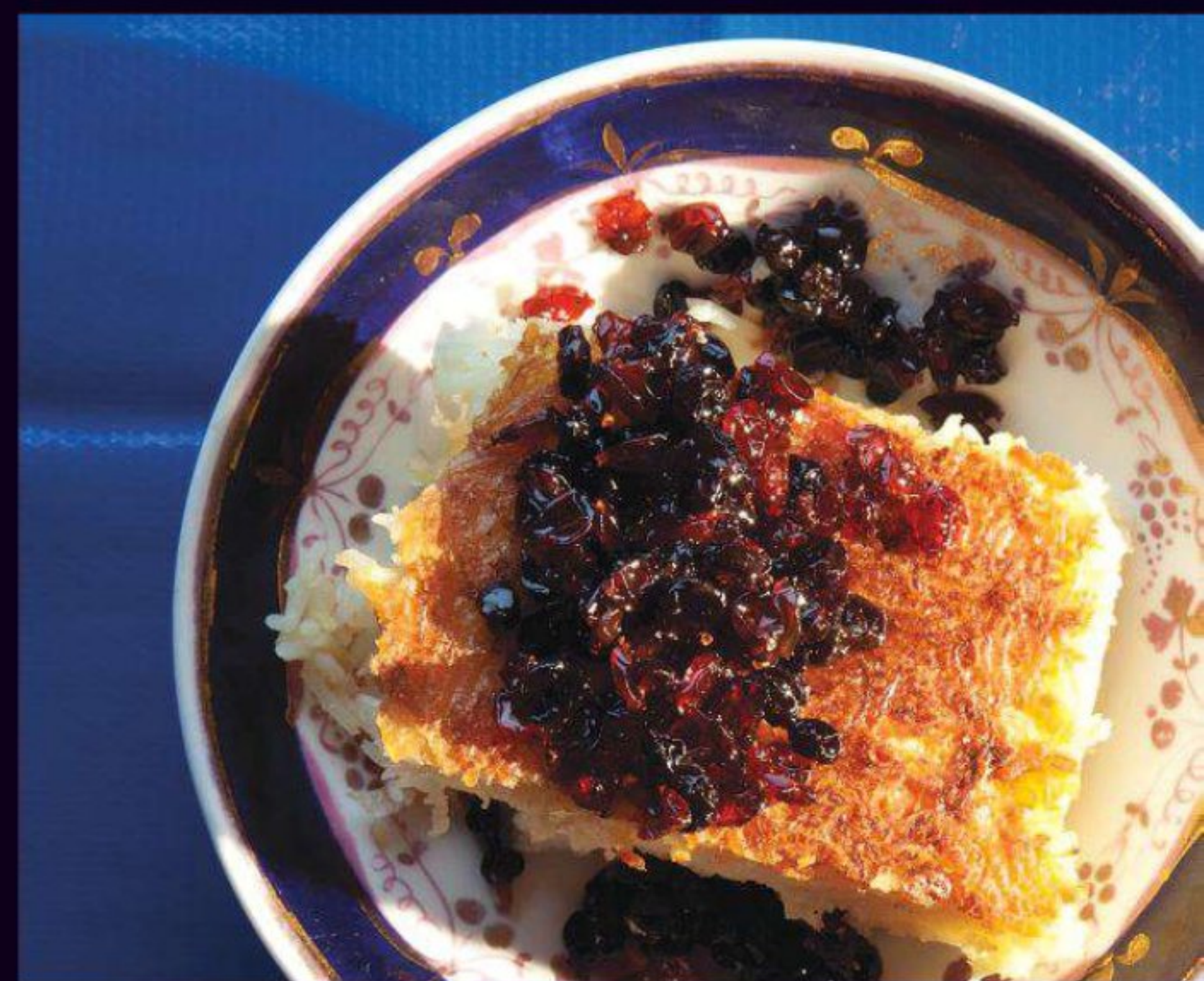


AND OF D AND ICE

mplex and captivating as ever

graphs by ALI FARBOUD

cooking beans; baked rice with barberries. Bottom row: yogurt and cucumber dip; a spice seller in Isfahan; leek and herb frittata with pomegranate seeds; a roadside cafe in Gilan province that specializes in kebabs. (See [page 76](#) for recipes.)





In 1982, I had an unforgettable meal at Ava Gardner's house in London. The actress, whom I had met through mutual friends, was charming in every way, but truth be told, it was the food that really wowed me. It had been prepared by a glamorous Iranian woman who had befriended Ava when she was filming *Bhowani Junction* in Pakistan in the mid 1950s, and I had never tasted anything like it. There was a platter of fluffy white rice speckled with

saffron-colored grains and topped with golden pieces of a crisp, wafer-like rice crust, called *tah dig*. There were bowls of *torshi*, Iranian pickles made with everything from cabbage to cucumbers, designed to cut through the incredible richness of the meaty stews on the table, and rice- and lamb-stuffed grapevine leaves that were served with a sweet-sour tomato sauce, so unlike the plain ones I knew as a child growing up in Lebanon.

Years later, when I began researching culinary history and writing about food, I often thought back to that meal. Iranian cooking is legendary in the realm of Middle Eastern food, and many dishes across that part of the world can trace their roots to Persian precedents: For example, take Morocco's fragrant tagines, relatives of Iran's *khoresh* stews, or the sweet-tart savory dishes whose distinctive flavor is achieved by cooking meat with fresh or dried fruit, which originated in Persia during ancient times. Persians brought their cuisine to the Indian subcontinent in the Middle Ages, and to this day the Persian and Hindi names for many dishes are nearly identical. (Persia is what the country was long known as in the west; in 1935, the Shah asked the international community to use the country's native name, Iran.) The Persian Empire, which spanned with some

interruptions from 550 BC to AD 651, was the greatest of the early civilizations; there were well-built roads from one end of the empire to the other, and *caravansaries*, or roadside inns, at regular intervals to provide shelter and food to travelers. Herodotus, the Greek historian, wrote that he was seduced by Persian food, and King Croesus of Lydia, an ancient land that is now part of Turkey, advised Cyrus the Great to lure troublesome tribes with "the good things on which the Persians live." Between the middle of the eighth century to the mid 13th century, the Abbasid Caliphate, an Arab-Muslim dynasty that encompassed swaths of the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Spain and Portugal, hired Persian chefs to cook for the heads of state. As Islam tightened its hold on the region, Arabs adopted and adapted Persian cuisine.

I've enjoyed cooking with Iranian friends in London and Los Angeles, two cities with large expat communities, but I desperately wanted to know the cuisine, its ingredients and techniques, more intimately. So when a friend of mine, an architect named Nasrine Faghih, moved back to her native Tehran a few years ago, I hatched a plan. I have a Lebanese passport, which makes it easy for me to get a visa; relations between the two countries are friendly. Through Nasrine and other Iranian

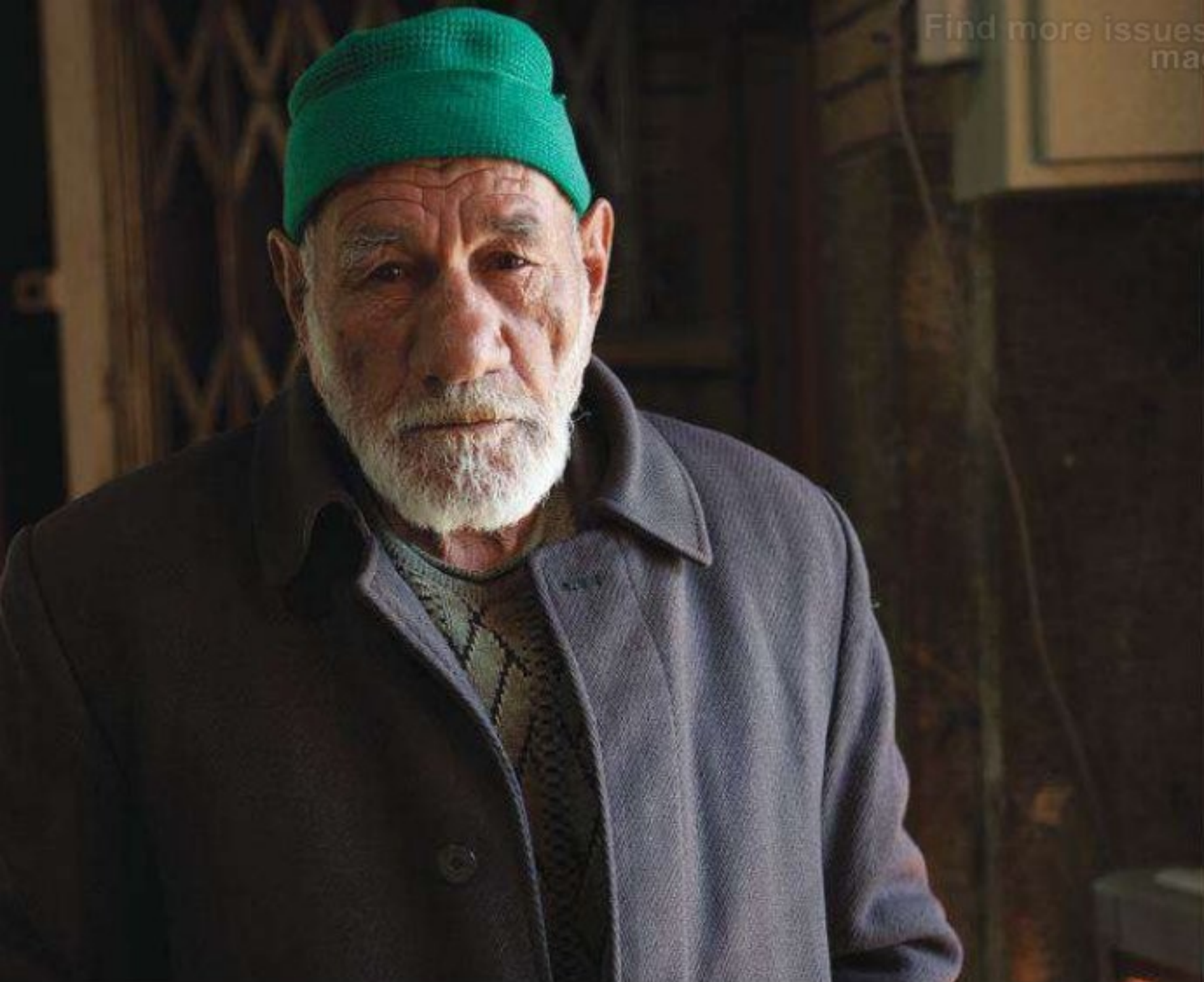
friends' networks, I set up a series of cooking dates for a visit this past December, both to the city and to areas nearby that are known for their regional specialties.

TEHRAN IS A SPRAWLING modern city of about eight million people that has been developed rather haphazardly over time. It's the country's cultural capital, laying claim to a thriving intellectual and artistic scene and a vibrant social life, much of which takes place behind closed doors in people's homes. I had actually been there once before in the mid 1970s, when the Shah was still in power; it was a quick work trip and I didn't get a sense of the local cuisine. Shortly after that visit, the people revolted against his corrupt rule and everything changed. For a brief period after he was exiled in 1979, there was euphoria among Iranians at the prospect of national unity and a more promising future. Little did they know that their revolution had paved the way for a repressive Islamic state where women had to hide their hair and hips and where alcohol and many other pleasures were outlawed. When I returned last year, I was struck by how life in Tehran is one of paradoxes: gray and drab on the outside and fun and even glamorous away from the authorities' watchful eyes. The lunches and dinners I went to were joyful and generous, despite the general sense of dejection at how the 2009 protests against the

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Below, from left: *baghali ghatogh*, beans with eggs and dill, and *borani-e bademjan*, eggplant and yogurt dip garnished with walnuts and saffron (see page 76 for recipes). Facing page: women in Isfahan carrying pots of *khoresh-e gheimeh*, lamb and split pea stew.





Clockwise, from top left: a vendor in a bazaar in Isfahan; *sabzi*, an herb salad that is served with most Persian meals; Fereydoon AbbasNejad's family having lunch at their home near the city of Qazvin; spiced chicken and tomato kebabs (see [page 76](#) for a recipe), a popular dish in Tehran's cafés.

contested election results had led nowhere. It moved me that, even in the face of such hardships, the food culture of Iran had not only survived, but thrived.

On my first day back in Tehran, I visited the markets, which were in full bloom with produce from the country's rich agricultural west. In Tajrish, one of the city's nicest outdoor bazaars, women—some clad in chadors, a full-body cloak, others elegantly dressed under long coats, with loose scarves draped over their hair—were buying what I recognized to be the cuisine's elemental ingredients: fresh pomegranates and limes, both fresh and dried; pickled vegetables and dried fruit; and delicate

threads of saffron, the dried stigmas of the native crocus flower that tint food yellow and give it a subtle, earthy spice. There were bins full of cardamom pods and cinnamon sticks, bottles of rose and other waters distilled from herbs and flowers, and the spice mix called *advieh*, comprising turmeric, cumin, ground coriander, and other spices, which I had read about in a book I'd owned for years, *The Legendary Cuisine of Persia* (Grub Street, 2002), by the late cookbook author Margaret Shaيدا. As we wandered through the stalls, Nasrine explained the use of foods that were unfamiliar to me: sour fruit jellies that looked like tiny jewels, used as a relish to flavor fish dishes, and

dried orange-blossom petals for tisanes.

Nasrine was excited for me to cook with her friend Minou Saberi, whom she said made the most delicious *khoresht*, the Iranian-style stew where meat, herbs, and vegetables or fruit slowly simmer until the whole is thick and rich. After my market tour, Saberi, a kind woman in her 70s who passed away shortly after my visit, joined me in Nasrine's kitchen and made an elegant *khoresht* with chicken, walnuts, and pomegranate molasses—another staple Iranian ingredient. As we ate the sweet, tart stew with white rice, Saberi explained that *khoresht* was different from *abgusht*, another style of stew where meat and vegetables are



Clockwise, from top left: bakers making *nan-e barbari* in Tehran; Fereydoon AbbasNejad at his family's home near the city of Qazvin; dried black limes, which lend complex and subtle sourness to Iranian dishes; *shirin polow*, a rice pilaf garnished with pistachios and almonds (see [page 77](#) for a recipe).

cooked in broth, removed and pounded to a paste, and then returned to thicken the soup with torn pieces of bread. In almost all of these stews, the predominant flavorings of Iranian cooking are front and center: saffron, which is ground and mixed with water before it's added to everything from rice to vegetable oil that is drizzled over finished dishes; Omani limes, an intensely flavorful variety, which are dried and used whole or ground for a dash of sour flavor; and sumac, the lemony tasting, crimson-colored berries that are ground into tart powder.

Saberi also prepared *baghali ghatogh*, a specialty from the north made with beans and

sabzi—a mix of wild herbs, spinach, and scallions that Iranian cooks use in massive quantities, both cooked, as in this case, and raw, to add a refreshing counterpoint to rich dishes. Saberi had bought hers at the market earlier that day; there are stalls that sell only *sabzi*, with each of the greens in separate crates so that the blend can be tailored to each customer's tastes. The vendor chopped the ingredients together in a machine that resembled a meat grinder, and packed the *sabzi* in a big plastic bag. I asked Saberi if some cooks thought chopping by hand was preferable. "You may want to spend hours chopping a mountain of herbs," she said, "but I have bet-

ter things to do with my time."

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG AFTER my arrival in Iran to realize that bread is another huge staple of the cuisine: While rice is often thought of as Iran's iconic food, I found that cooks usually reserve rice dishes, particularly elegantly spiced ones laden with dried fruit and nuts, for guests and special occasions. Bread, on the other hand, is everywhere, though it's never taken for granted: It's considered sinful to let bread fall to the ground or be discarded. If it becomes too dry, it is broken and added to soups or ground to make bread crumbs.

It was in Tehran's bakeries that I first expe-

IT WAS IN TEHRAN'S BAKERIES THAT I FIRST EXPERIENCED the legendary hospitality of Iranian cooks. Every time I stopped to watch the baking, I'D BE OFFERED WARM LOAVES OF BREAD TAKE HOME

rienced the legendary hospitality of Iranian cooks. Every time I stopped to watch the baking, I would be offered warm bread to take home. One morning, about a week after I arrived, I became mesmerized watching the bakers at a place near Nasrine's house. They were making *nan-e sangak*, a bread that's baked over hot pebbles lining the bottom of a wood-fired oven, leaving charred indentations on the loaf. One baker shaped some incredibly wet dough into a long oval, which he flopped onto a peel that another baker then slipped into the oven, depositing the unbaked loaf and then swiftly removing a baked one. The cooling oblong breads hung against a wall on something like a coat rack to keep them from getting soggy with steam. While *sangak* is eaten with everything from stews to kebabs, *lavash* is even more common: The very thin rectangular or oval flatbread can be stored for days and made soft again by sprinkling with a little water and reheating. It is often used as a utensil, to scoop up food, or as a wrap for ingredients.

Later that morning, I had a particularly wonderful breakfast at a modest café where the owner, who was very old but still swiftly shuttling between his stove and tables, brought me a warm loaf of *nan-e barbari*, a seeded loaf similar to Turkish *pide*, from a neighboring bakery, along with a plate of fresh feta-like cheese and tea. I was the only woman there that morning; the rest of the clients were as old as the café owner, and they were all sipping their tea through sugar cubes, as is done throughout Iran, and wrapping their cheese with folds of that delicious bread.

As much as Iranians respect bread, they revere rice (*berenj* in Persian), and they have turned the cooking of it into an absolute art form. Many Iranians buy rice and rock salt—the only salt traditionalists will use with rice—at stores that sell nothing but these ingredients. I encountered such a shop, in Bandar-e Anzali, the caviar capital on the Caspian Sea, when I left Tehran for a few days to explore Gilan province in the northwestern part of the country. It had half a dozen sacks of rice, each with a sign indicating the variety and price. It was here that I heard a woman ask the age of the rice she was buying, and discovered that discerning Iranian cooks prefer their

rice to be at least a year old. “You shouldn’t eat freshly harvested rice,” she said in broken English as she gestured for me to smell the grains. “It needs to be fragrant.”

I’ve never seen so many different ways of cooking rice as I did in Iran. The following day, I visited Tahereh Akbar and her daughter Laleh Akbar at their home in Rasht, the capital of Gilan province. In their small, modern kitchen, the women showed me how to make rice the way cooks do in northern Iran: a style called *kateh* that calls for cooking the rice



until the water is absorbed and a crisp layer forms on the bottom and sides of the pan. They also made *tah chin*, a baked rice dish that's inverted, cut into squares, and sprinkled with dried barberries, a local fruit with a tart flavor, and currants, which gave the dish an even more appealing aroma and texture.

Kateh's rice crust is less pronounced in flavor and texture than the coveted *tah dig*, a crust that is the distinguishing feature of many of Iran's most elaborate rice dishes, or *polows*. I tasted one such dish the very next day at the home of Fereydoon AbbasNejad, a burly man with the most extraordinary handlebar moustache, on a farm outside the city of Qazvin, south of Gilan province. He and his family prepared a “jeweled” *shirin polow*, a festive dish studded with chicken, orange rind, and pistachios, with *shami kebab*, succulent ground beef kebabs seasoned with turmeric, cinnamon, and saffron. AbbasNejad parboils his rice before steaming it, and tastes it at regular intervals as it cooks, the

way Italians taste pasta to ensure the right degree of al dente texture. He explained that the grains needed to retain a hint of bite on the inside, but not feel brittle.

AbbasNejad drained the cooked rice, then to make *tah dig*, he placed *lavash* over the bottom of a pot before spooning the drained rice over top, and putting it back on the stove to crisp up. Purists make *tah dig* just with rice—which is how I like it—or by covering the bottom of a pot with thinly sliced potatoes. But AbbasNejad's way with bread, which created a golden crust that he mixed in with the rice so you got some tender and some crisp bits with each bite, was delicious, and made the *polow* feel even more substantial and special.

While we cooked together, I was amused to see this big man carefully wrap each of the lids for his rice pots with a fitted cloth. As I travelled around Iran, I noticed that every household has a selection of different-size fitted cloths designed to prevent condensation on the lid from dripping back into the rice and ruining its perfect texture.

PERHAPS THE BEST TIME of the year to experience Iranians' legendary hospitality is Ashura, a solemn day in December for Shia Muslims that commemorates the martyrdom of the prophet's grandson at the battle of Karbala. I happened to be in Isfahan, Iran's third-largest city, for the holiday, when people prepare food to distribute not only to the poor but also to neighbors and friends. The cooks at the hotel where I was staying prepared a cauldron of *khoresht-e gheimeh* (a stew made with lamb and split peas) that they placed in the hotel's entrance next to a gigantic pot of rice. As neighbors filed in, servers filled Styrofoam containers for them to take home. But even more impressive was the kitchen of the nearby mosque where cooks were preparing enough chicken and lamb *khoresht* to feed a few thousand people. In the back room, lambs were awaiting slaughter while men butchered more than a thousand chickens for the stew.

When I returned to Tehran later that evening, I found that Nasrine's neighbor had brought us a plate of cakelike *halvah*, a dessert that she had made with toasted flour, sugar, and saffron and molded into an elaborate star pattern. As Nasrine and I sat at the table, enjoying the sweet and beautiful confection, it occurred to me that while none of my meals on these two trips to Iran had been as formal or fancy as my first taste of the cuisine at Ava Gardner's house all those years ago, they had been just as delicious and gracious. ✍️



Sour and Sweet

Pickled vegetables or relishes, called *torshi*, appear often on the Persian table; they cut through the richness of roasted meats, stews, and soups and to bring balance to meals. Though the term comes from the Persian word *torsh*, which means sour, acidity is only one of the flavors that figures in these condiments. *Torshi* are made with a vast array of spices, aromatics, and herbs, such as mint, tarragon, and parsley, generous amounts of garlic, and sometimes a touch of sugar. The pickles gained popularity following the spread of Islam to Persia in the seventh century, when grapes, which were previously used to make wine, were transformed into vinegar instead (Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol). The tart liquid became a vital medium for preserving vegetables, and over time pickling became central

to the Persian kitchen. While certain *torshi* ferment for only a few weeks and are eaten while still crisp and tart, others, such as the famed *torshi-e seer*, made with garlic, might age up to ten years, until the garlic turns soft and pungent. *Torshi* vary from region to region and kitchen to kitchen, but some types are universally popular. ❶ *Torshi-e kalam*, a sweet-tart slaw of sliced cabbage, dried chile flakes, and dill contrasts beautifully with Persian-style rice. ❷ *Torshi-e piaz* features thinly sliced onions pickled with coriander, nigella seeds, and tarragon, and is commonly served with *kufteh*, Persian meatballs. ❸ *Torshi-e liteh* is creamy smashed marinated eggplant with parsley, cilantro, and tarragon, typically eaten with *abgusht*, a classic style of stew. (See [page 77](#) for recipes.) —Andy Baraghani

Ash-e Reshteh

(Iranian Noodle Soup)

SERVES 6-8

This beautifully spiced vegetable soup (pictured on page 69) is made with *reshteh*, Iranian noodles.

- ½ cup canola oil
- 2 onions, thinly sliced
- ½ cup each dried kidney and cannellini beans, chickpeas, soaked overnight, drained
- 1½ tbsp. ground turmeric
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 6 cups chopped spinach
- 1 cup chopped parsley
- ½ cup brown lentils
- 1 bunch chives, finely chopped
- 2 cups *reshteh* (see page 84) or dried linguini
- 8 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp. dried mint
- ¼ cup powdered whey (optional; see page 84), mixed with 4 tbsp. water

1 Heat ¼ cup oil in an 8-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onions, and cook until caramelized, about 20 minutes. Transfer half the onions to a bowl; set aside for garnish. Add all beans, turmeric, and salt and pepper to onions in pan; cook, stirring, for 5 minutes. Add 12 cups water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook, covered, until beans are barely tender, about 50 minutes. Add spinach, parsley, lentils, and chives; cook for 20 minutes. Add noodles, and cook until noodles and beans are tender, about 12 minutes more.

2 Meanwhile, heat remaining oil in a 10" skillet over medium-high heat. Add garlic; cook until lightly browned and crisp, about 3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to paper towels to drain. Return skillet to heat and add mint; cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Ladle soup into bowls; top with reserved caramelized onions and garlic chips, then drizzle with the mint oil and whey.

Baghali Ghatogh

(Lima Beans with Eggs and Dill)

SERVES 4

Eggs cooked with dill-scented lima beans (pictured on page 71) is a comforting northern Iranian specialty.

- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter
- ½ tsp. ground turmeric
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 4 cups finely chopped dill
- 1 cup dried lima beans, soaked overnight, drained
- ¼ tsp. crushed saffron
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- eggs
- Saffron threads, to garnish

Heat butter in a 12" skillet over medium heat. Add turmeric and garlic; cook until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Add 3 cups dill and the

beans; cook until dill is slightly wilted, about 2 minutes. Add crushed saffron and 5 cups water; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook, covered, until beans are tender, about 1½ hours. Season with salt and pepper; stir in remaining dill. Using a spoon, form 4 shallow wells in bean mixture; crack an egg into each well. Cook until eggs are cooked over-easy, about 3 minutes. Sprinkle with saffron before serving.

Borani-e Bademjan

(Eggplant and Yogurt Dip)

MAKES 2 CUPS

Garnished with walnuts and garlic chips, this creamy dip (pictured on page 71) makes a great appetizer.

- 2 large eggplants
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, plus ½ small onion, thinly sliced
- 1 clove garlic, minced, plus 1 clove, thinly sliced
- ½ cup Greek yogurt
- Kosher salt and freshly

ground black pepper, to taste

1 large yellow onion, minced

2 cups minced parsley

1½ cups minced cilantro

2 bunches scallions, minced

2 cups dried kidney beans, soaked overnight, drained

1½ tbsp. dried fenugreek

4 dried black limes

Lavash or pita, for serving

Heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Season veal with salt and pepper. Add to pan; cook, turning, until browned all over, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate; set aside. Add turmeric and onion; cook until softened, about 10 minutes. Add parsley, cilantro, and scallions; cook until dark green, about 8 minutes. Return veal to pan with beans, fenugreek, limes, and 4 cups water; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook until limes have softened, about 10 minutes. Pierce 2

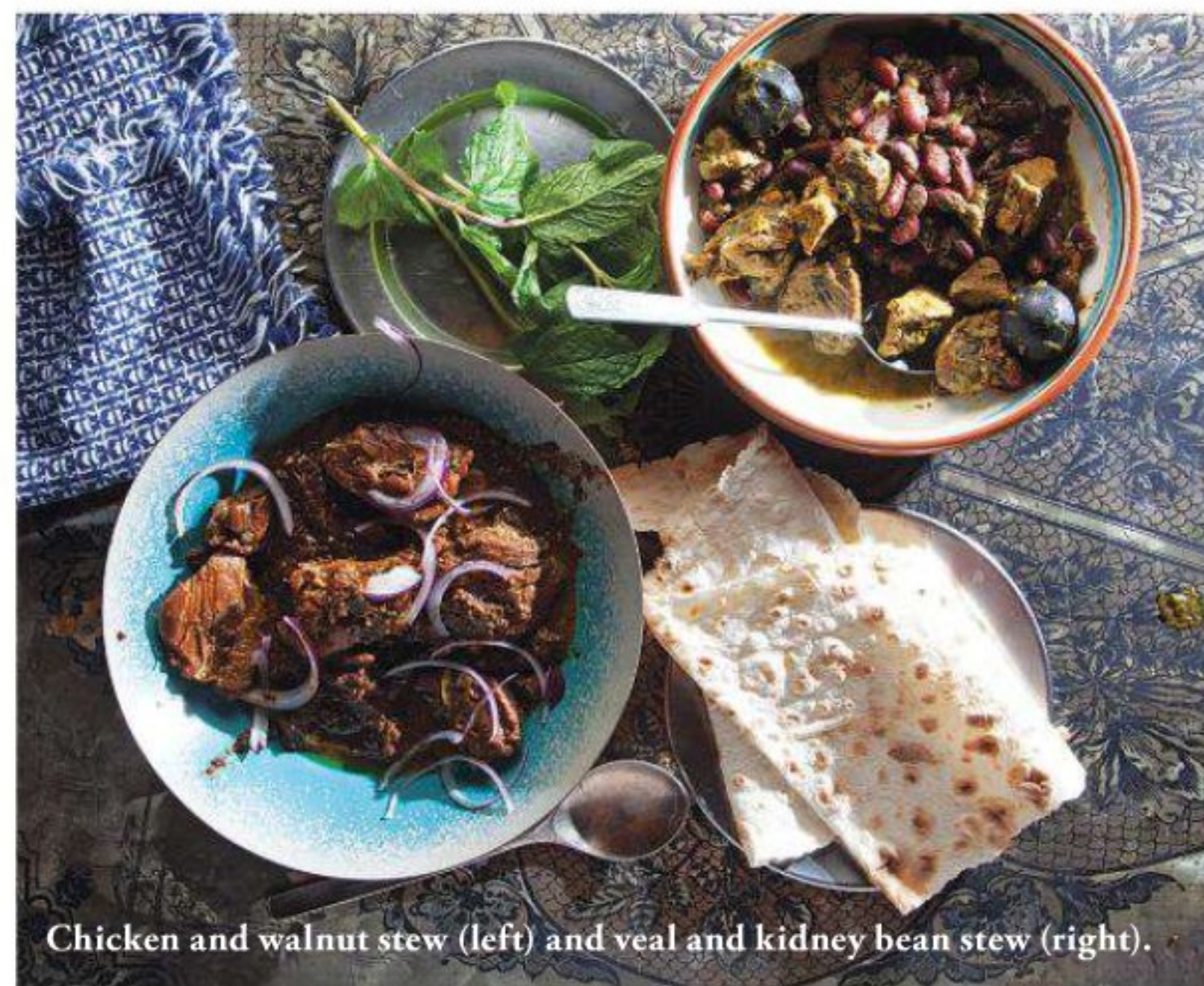
Ghormeh Sabzi

(Veal and Kidney Bean Stew)

SERVES 4-6

Fenugreek, an aromatic dried herb, gives this hearty stew (pictured below) its distinctly floral flavor. (See page 84 for hard-to-find ingredients.)

- ¼ cup canola oil
- 1 lb. veal shoulder, cut into 1" cubes
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 tbsp. ground turmeric



Chicken and walnut stew (left) and veal and kidney bean stew (right).

limes with a paring knife; cook, partially covered, until veal is tender, about 1½ hours. Serve with lavash.

Jujeh Kabab

(Spiced Chicken and Tomato Kebabs)

SERVES 4

A marinade of orange, cumin, and saffron flavors these juicy chicken kebabs (pictured on page 72).

- 1 cup plain yogurt
- ½ cup fresh lime juice
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 tbsp. orange zest
- 1 tbsp. ground cumin
- 1 tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 tbsp. ground black pepper
- 2 tsp. crushed saffron
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 large yellow onion, sliced
- 2 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 4 plum tomatoes, cored
- Ground sumac, to garnish (see page 84)
- 2 limes, halved
- Lavash or pita, for serving

Stir together yogurt, juice, oil, zest, cumin, salt, pepper, saffron, coriander, garlic, and onions in a bowl; add chicken, and toss to coat. Chill for 4 hours. Build a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill, heat a gas grill to medium-high, or heat broiler to high. Skewer chicken on 4 metal skewers, and skewer tomatoes lengthwise on another skewer. Grill chicken and tomatoes, turning often, until tomatoes are soft and charred, about 7 minutes, and chicken is cooked through and slightly charred, about 10 minutes. Sprinkle skewers with sumac; serve with limes and lavash.

Khoresht-e Fesenjan

(Chicken and Walnut Stew)

SERVES 6-8

Pomegranate molasses and walnuts bring sweet, sour, and bitter notes to this classic stew (pictured at left).

- ¼ cup canola oil
- 2 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 2½" pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1½ tbsp. ground turmeric
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 2 cups finely chopped spinach
- 1½ lb. walnuts
- 2 cups pomegranate molasses (see page 84)
- ¼ cup sugar
- Sliced red onion, to garnish

1 Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, season chicken with salt and pepper, and add to skillet; cook, turning, until browned, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate; set aside. Add turmeric and onion; cook until soft, about 10 minutes. Add spinach; cook until wilted, about 1 minute. Remove from heat, and set aside.

2 Meanwhile, process walnuts in a food processor into a very fine paste, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a 6-qt. Dutch oven, and heat over medium-low heat; cook until fragrant, about 15 minutes. Stir in 8 cups water, and bring to a simmer over medium heat; cook, skimming any oil that floats to the surface, until light brown and thickened, about 2 hours. Add molasses and sugar; cook until thickened once more, about 25 minutes. Add reserved chicken and onion-spinach mixture; cook until chicken is cooked through, about 30 minutes. Garnish with onions.

Kuku Sabzi

(Leek and Herb Frittata)

SERVES 8-10

This herb-laced frittata of eggs, potatoes, and leeks (pictured on [page 69](#)) is a popular Iranian side dish.

- ½ cup chopped cilantro, plus more for garnish
- ½ cup chopped dill
- ½ cup chopped parsley
- ½ tsp. ground turmeric
- 12 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 large russet potato, peeled, grated, and blanched
- 1 large leek, quartered lengthwise, thinly sliced crosswise
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 6 tbsp. canola oil
- ¼ cup pomegranate seeds

Stir together cilantro, dill, parsley, turmeric, eggs, potato, leek, and salt and pepper in a bowl. Heat 4 tbsp. oil in a 12" nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Pour egg mixture into skillet, cover with lid, and cook until almost set, about 16 minutes. Invert frittata onto a plate, return skillet to heat, and add remaining oil. Slide frittata back into skillet; cook until underside is browned and crisp, about 6 minutes. Garnish with chopped cilantro and pomegranate, and cut into wedges.

Kuftah

(Herb Meatballs in Tomato-Plum Sauce)

SERVES 4-6

These tender meatballs (pictured on [page 68](#)) are simmered in a sweet-tart tomato and dried plum sauce.

- ½ cup yellow split peas
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 cup cooked basmati rice
- ½ cup finely chopped dill
- ½ cup finely chopped tarragon
- ¼ cup finely chopped parsley
- ¼ cup finely chopped chives
- 1 tbsp. ground turmeric
- ½ tsp. crushed saffron
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ½ cup plus 7 dried sour plums (see [page 84](#))
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 medium yellow onions, sliced
- ¼ cup tomato paste

- 2 plum tomatoes, cored, seeded, and roughly chopped

1 Bring peas and 2 cups water to a boil in a 2-qt. saucepan over high heat; cook until tender, about 40 minutes. Drain; transfer to a bowl. Add beef, rice, dill, tarragon, parsley, chives, turmeric, saffron, egg, salt and pepper; mix. Place ½ cup meat mixture in your hand and place a dried plum in the center; form around plum into a 2" ball. Repeat to make seven meatballs; chill.

2 Heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onions; cook until softened, about 15 minutes. Add tomato paste; cook until lightly caramelized, about 2 minutes. Add tomatoes; cook until soft, about 5 minutes. Add remaining ½ cup dried plums and 3 cups water; boil. Add meatballs to sauce, reduce heat to medium-low; cook, covered, until cooked through, about 45 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Mast-o Khair

(Yogurt and Cucumber Dip)

MAKES 2 CUPS

Topped with rose petals and golden raisins, this simple dip (pictured on [page 68](#)) is an elegant condiment.

- 10 tbsp. golden raisins
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 1 lb. plus 2 oz. plain yogurt
- 1 tbsp. dried mint
- 3 medium cucumbers, peeled
- Dried rose petals, for garnish (see [page 84](#))

Soak raisins in warm water until soft, 8-10 minutes; drain. Place garlic on a cutting board and sprinkle with salt; using a knife, mash into a paste. Transfer to bowl along with 8 tbsp. raisins, yogurt, and mint; seed and mince cucumbers and stir into yogurt mixture. Garnish with remaining raisins and rose petals. Chill.

Shirin Polow

(Iranian Rice Pilaf)

SERVES 8-10

This rice pilaf (pictured on [page 73](#)) is famed for its thick, crisp *tah dig* crust and crown of sweet garnishes.

- ½ cup sugar
- ¾ tsp. crushed saffron
- ¾ cup thinly sliced orange peel
- 1 tbsp. rose water
- 4 cups long-grain white rice
- 2 tbsp. kosher salt
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup canola oil
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- ¾ cup finely shredded carrots
- ½ cup slivered almonds
- ½ cup chopped pistachios

1 Bring sugar, ½ tsp. saffron, and ½ cup water to a boil in 2-qt. pan over high heat. Add ½ cup orange peel; cook until tender, 8-10 minutes. Let

cool, and stir in rose water; set aside.

2 Make the rice: Rinse rice in a strainer under water until water runs clear. Place rice in a 6-qt. pan. Add salt and 4 cups water, and cover; soak for 2 hours. Place pan over high heat; boil. Cook until rice begins to rise to the surface, about 12 minutes; drain. Return pan to medium-high heat; add remaining saffron, milk, and oil. Return rice to pan, forming it into a mound; using handle of a wooden spoon, poke 5 holes in the mound (to let steam escape); cover, and cook for 15 minutes.

3 Pour butter and 1 cup boiling water over rice; cover. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook until a golden crust forms on bottom, 30-35 minutes. Transfer rice to a platter, separating the grains as you go; break up crust from bottom of pot, and stir into rice. Garnish rice with candied and remaining raw orange peel, carrots, almonds, and pistachios.

Tah Chin

(Baked Rice with Barberries)

SERVES 10-12

This northern Iranian specialty (pictured on [page 69](#)) is topped with dried barberries, a tart local fruit.

- 3 cups long-grain white rice
- 2 tbsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 1½ cups plain yogurt
- ½ cup canola oil, plus more
- ½ tsp. crushed saffron
- 4 egg yolks
- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter
- ¾ cup barberries (see [page 84](#)) or dried cranberries
- ½ cup currants
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 1 tbsp. rose water

1 Rinse rice in a strainer under running water until water runs clear. Transfer to a bowl with 2 tbsp. salt, cover with water, and soak for 2 hours; drain. Boil 6 cups water in a 4-qt. saucepan over high heat. Add rice; cook until it begins to rise to the surface, about 12 minutes. Drain and rinse until water runs clear.

2 Heat oven to 350°. Transfer rice to a bowl; stir in yogurt, oil, saffron, yolks, and salt. Pour rice mixture into a greased 9" x 13" baking dish; smooth top and cover with foil. Bake rice until a golden-brown crust forms on bottom, about 1 hour, 45 minutes. Uncover, and run a knife between rice and dish to loosen crust; place a platter over dish and invert. Cut rice into squares.

3 Heat butter in a 10" skillet over medium-high heat. Add barberries, currants, and sugar; cook until hot. Add rose water; cook for 1 minute; remove from heat. Garnish rice with berries and currants.

Torshi-e Liteh

(Eggplant and Herb Pickle)

MAKES 1½ CUPS

Serve this tart, herbaceous eggplant pickle (pictured on [page 75](#)) with Persian rice dishes and stews.

- 1¼ lb. Japanese eggplant, peeled and halved lengthwise
- Kosher salt, to taste
- ¾ cup apple cider vinegar
- ½ tsp. ground turmeric
- ½ tsp. ground coriander
- ½ tsp. caraway seeds
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp. chopped tarragon
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped parsley
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped cilantro
- 1½ tsp. dried mint

Sprinkle eggplants heavily with salt, and place on a wire rack set over paper towels; let drain for 20 minutes. Roughly chop eggplants; add to a 4-qt. saucepan along with ½ cup vinegar, turmeric, coriander, caraway, garlic, and ½ cup plus 2 tbsp. water. Bring to a simmer over medium heat; cook until tender, about 20 minutes. Meanwhile, combine remaining vinegar, tarragon, parsley, cilantro, and mint in a bowl. Stir herb mixture into eggplant mixture; transfer to a bowl. Chill.

Torshi-e Kalam

(Pickled Cabbage and Dill)

MAKES 4 CUPS

These spicy cabbage pickles (pictured on [page 75](#)) offset the richness of roasted meat.

- 1 tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 1 clove garlic, lightly crushed
- ½ green cabbage, cored, shredded
- ½ bunch dill, roughly chopped
- 3 cups apple cider vinegar

Toss together salt, chile, garlic, cabbage, and dill in a 1-qt. glass jar; and top with vinegar. Seal tightly; let sit for 2 weeks before serving.

Torshi-e Piaz

(Red Onion and Herb Pickles)

MAKES 4 CUPS

These tarragon-flavored pickles (pictured on [page 75](#)) pair well with Iranian meatballs (see recipe, at left) and other meat dishes.

- 3 cups distilled white vinegar
- 3 tbsp. kosher salt
- 2 tbsp. dried tarragon
- 1 tbsp. dried mint
- 1 tbsp. dried savory
- 1 tbsp. coriander seeds
- 1 tbsp. nigella seeds (see [page 84](#))
- 1 dried chile de arbol
- 1 lb. red onions, thinly sliced

Heat everything but onions in a 4-qt. pan over medium heat for 5 minutes. Add onions, and cook until softened, 5-6 minutes. Transfer onions to a 1-qt. glass jar; pour over vinegar. Seal; let sit overnight before serving.

SAVEUR MENU

SAVEUR's guide to EVENTS, PROMOTIONS & PRODUCTS



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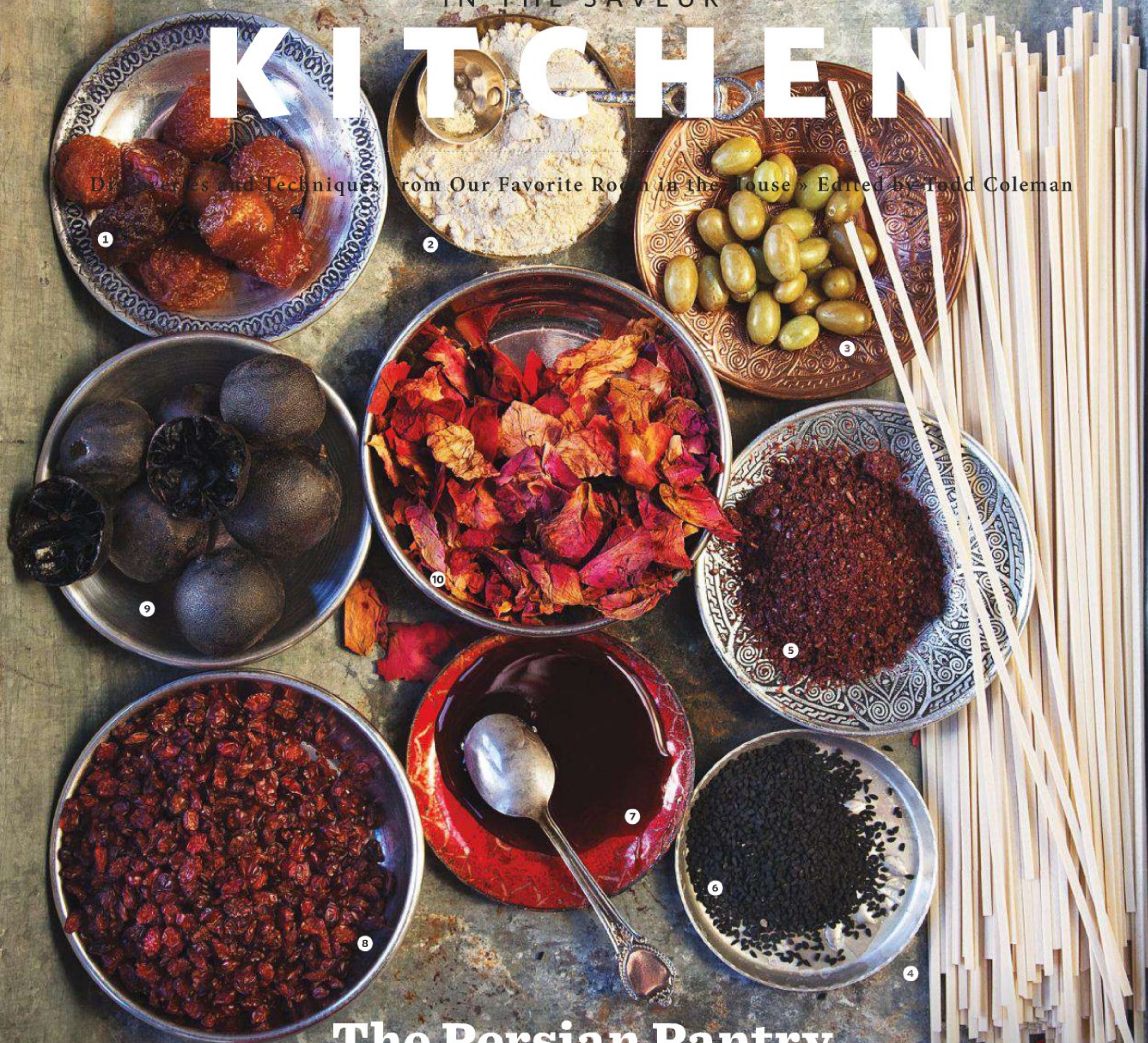
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IN THE SAVEUR

KITCHEN

Dishes and Techniques from Our Favorite Room in the House » Edited by Todd Coleman



The Persian Pantry

As we tested the recipes for this issue's feature on Iran ("Land of Bread and Spice," [page 68](#)), we found many of the ingredients that give Persian cooking its characteristic tart, sweet, and aromatic flavors at Middle Eastern markets and specialty foods stores within blocks of our kitchen. Anyone living in a place with a thriving Iranian-American community will have no problem finding the foods described here, but no matter where you live, they are easy to obtain by mail order. (See The Pantry, [page 84](#), for sources.) That's how we came by the **1** *alu bukhara*, or dried Persian golden plums, which impart fruity acidity to the meatballs with tomato sauce (*kufteh*). **2** *Kashk*, a yogurtlike by-product of butter-making, is drizzled into dishes such as *ash-e reshteh*, a Persian noodle soup, for creamy richness. It's also sold as a powder that is reconstituted with water. **3** Unripe grapes called *ghureh* come fresh, pickled (as pictured, in which case they're called *torshi-e ghureh*), dried (*gard-e ghureh*), or juiced (*ab-e ghureh*). Their sour edge cuts the richness of dishes like slow-cooked eggplant stews. **4** *Reshteh*, linguine-like wheat noodles, are added to soups. **5** Brick-red *somagh*, the ground fruit of the sumac bush, lends lemony brightness to kebabs and other grilled foods. **6** *Siah daneh*, the tiny black seeds of the nigella plant, bring a nutty-peppery note to red onion and herb *torshi* (pickle). **7** *Rab-e anar*, or pomegranate molasses, a syrup made by boiling the fruit's juice, provides sweet-tart flavor in dishes like *khoresh-t-e fesenjan*, the classic chicken and walnut stew. **8** *Zereeshk* (dried barberries) give their bright flavor and color to dishes like *tah chin* (baked rice with barberries); sautéing them with butter and sugar mellows their acidity. **9** *Limu Omani* (dried black limes), whole fruits boiled in brine and dried, infuse dishes such as veal and kidney bean stew (*ghormeh sabzi*), with citrusy, musky flavor. **10** Fragrant *gole-e sorkh* (dried rose petals) flavor beverages and desserts, and garnish dishes such as yogurt and cucumber dip (*masto-khiar*). —Andy Baraghani

Bare Bones

Of all the pleasures celebrated in Mei Chin's ode to bones (see "Beautiful Bones," [page 28](#)), the luscious stuff inside a beef marrow bone may be the most irresistible. That was what Bruce and Eric Bromberg decided when they put the dish pictured below on the menu of their Blue Ribbon restaurants in New York City, back in the early 1990s. During their culinary training in Paris, the brothers had acquired a habit from their coworkers of snatching bones left over from making stock and eating the delicious marrow inside; they figured it was time to bring this cook's treat out of the kitchen. "No other restaurant was serving bones this way," Eric Bromberg recalls—the closest you might get would be the veal shank in osso buco or the bones in a meaty French *pot-au-feu*. The Brombergs were determined to feature bones front and center, so they chose beef femur bones—the section extending from hip to knee—which are large in diameter and contain copious marrow. "Ask your butcher for two-inch bones, center cut," Eric says. "If they're cut from the end, the marrow will be less plentiful." They soaked the bones in salt water in the refrigerator to draw out any discoloration, and then poached them on the stove top so they could keep an eye on them and plate them when the marrow had softened to just the right custardy texture. "This food is not haute," Eric says. "But we wanted to present bones in all their glory." Two decades later, their customers won't let them take the dish off the menu. —Hilary Merzbacher



Beef Marrow Bones with Fried Parsley

SERVES 6-8

We love this now-classic dish served at the Blue Ribbon restaurants in New York City, in which the marrow is spread over grilled toast and topped with fried parsley.

- 3 lb. center-cut beef marrow bones, cut into 2" lengths
- 1 cup kosher salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup olive oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flat-leaf parsley leaves
- 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ "-thick slices challah bread
- Fleur de sel, to garnish

1 Place bones and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup kosher salt in a bowl and cover with cold water; chill and let soak to remove any blood, 1-2 days. Change the water three times during this period, adding another $\frac{1}{4}$ cup kosher salt each time. Drain bones.

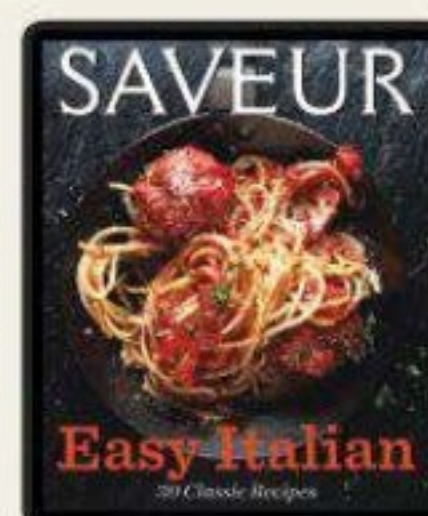
2 Place bones in a 6-qt. saucepan and pour enough water to come 1" above bones. Place over medium-low heat, and bring to a gentle simmer; cook until marrow is hot in the center, about 25 minutes. Using tongs, transfer bones to a plate.

3 Meanwhile, heat $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil in an 8" skillet over medium-high heat; add parsley, and cook until crisp, about 15 seconds. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to paper towels to drain; set aside and discard cooking oil. Heat a cast-iron grill pan over high heat, and brush challah bread with remaining oil; grill bread, turning once, until lightly charred with grill marks and toasted, about 2 minutes.

4 To serve, place warm marrow bones on a platter and sprinkle with fried parsley and fleur de sel; serve with challah toast on the side.

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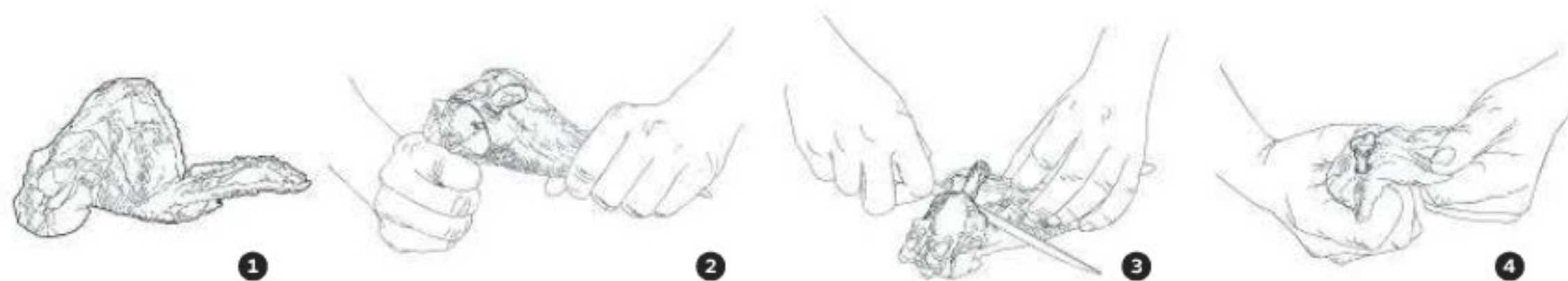
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Can Do

AS I RESEARCHED the traditional New England baked bean supper for this issue (see “Full of Beans,” page 38), I fell for the bread that typically comes with the meal. Wholesome, substantial brown bread—equal parts corn, rye, and wheat flour combined with molasses and buttermilk—is steamed in a coffee can that rests in a hot-water bath, on the stove top or in the oven, until the batter rises into a spongy bread. The recipe has roots in the Colonial era, when New Englanders baked a similar loaf in a wood-fired oven. Though it's hard to pinpoint when people began steaming brown bread, that method had caught on widely by the mid 1800s, when, according to historian Sandy Oliver, brown bread surged in popularity due to a revival of interest in early American foods. Today's brown bread is lighter than the original, because of the addition of baking powder, which, when activated by acids in the buttermilk and the molasses, releases carbon dioxide and leavens the bread. You can buy a respectable version made by B&M, the Maine cannery that's also one of this country's largest producers of baked beans. But we've found that this rich, sweet, tangy bread is easy (not to mention fun) to make. We wouldn't think of eating baked beans without a thick slab of it to sop up the sauce.

—Gabriella Gershenson



Frenching 101

For the chicken lollipops recipe on page 32, frenching the chicken wings—cutting and shaping them to expose a length of bone—creates a built-in handle to grasp as you eat the succulent meat. Here's how to do it: **1** Begin with a whole chicken wing, consisting of a fat drumstick at one end, a drumette in the middle, and a pointed wing tip. **2** Grip the drumstick in one hand and the wing tip in the other. Bend the wing back forcefully at the joint between the drum-

stick and the drumette, so that a bone at the end of the drumstick pops out through the skin. **3** Place the wing on a cutting board, and use a knife to cut through the joint between the drumstick and the drumette, fully separating them. Then, gripping the exposed bone at the end of the drumstick, push all the meat to the opposite end, to form a length of bone topped by a knob of meat. **4** Grip the remaining drumette and wing tip in opposite hands, and bend them back at the joint, as you did in step 2, to reveal the ends of two bones—one larger, one

TODD COLEMAN; ILLUSTRATIONS: BRENDA WEAVER

Brown Bread

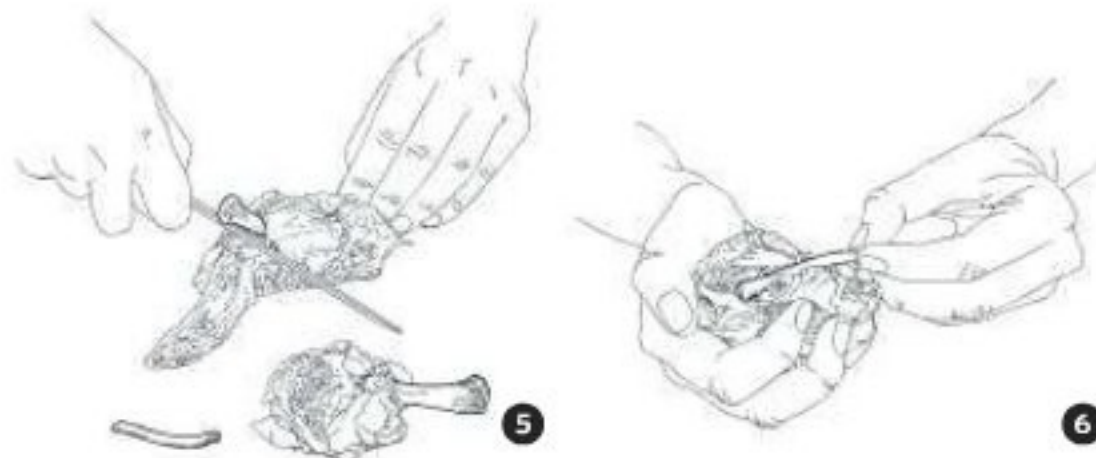
SERVES 6-8

Chewy and dark, this bread gets its acidic tang from buttermilk and molasses. A coffee can molds the loaf into its signature cylinder shape.

- ½ cup stone-ground cornmeal
- ½ cup rye flour
- ¼ cup whole-wheat flour
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. baking soda
- ½ cup unsulfured molasses
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- Butter, for greasing and serving

1 Heat oven to 300°. In a large bowl, whisk together cornmeal, rye, whole-wheat and all-purpose flours, salt, and baking powder and soda; set aside. In another bowl, whisk together molasses, buttermilk, and egg until smooth; pour over dry ingredients, and stir with a spoon until just combined. Transfer to a cleaned and greased 13-oz. metal coffee can, and cover can with a piece of foil; place in the center of a 6-qt. saucepan. Pour 6 cups water into pot around can, and bring to a boil over high heat. Transfer pan to oven, and bake until a toothpick inserted into the middle of the bread comes out clean, 2½-3 hours.

2 Remove can from water bath, and let cool for 20 minutes. Uncover and unmold bread from can; let cool completely. Slice into thick rounds and spread with butter.



smaller and pointed. **5** Place the drumette and wing tip on the cutting board, and use a knife to cut off the wing tip. Discard the wing tip, or reserve it for making stock. **6** Take the smaller, pointed bone in one hand, and wiggle it until it is free of the flesh; discard. Then, gripping the bone at the end of the drumette, push all the meat to the opposite end, to form a length of bone topped by a knob of meat, as you did in step 3. Repeat with the rest of the chicken wings, then marinate and fry according to the directions in the recipe. —Monica Floirendo

Recipes by Category

Appetizers & Sides

Bacon-Wrapped Artichokes.....	67
Baked Scallops with Parmesan.....	66
Baked Rice with Barberries.....	76
Beef Broth with Tortellini and Parmesan.....	32
Beef Marrow Bones with Fried Parsley.....	80
Brown Bread.....	83
Chicken Lollipops.....	32
Chicken Soup with Semolina Dumplings.....	51
Crab Imperial.....	24
Cream of Watercress Soup.....	36
Eggplant and Yogurt Dip.....	76
Fried Mozzarella Sandwiches.....	67
Grilled Polenta with Salt Cod Mousse.....	66
Iranian Rice Pilaf.....	77
Leek and Herb Frittata.....	77
Meat Croquettes.....	67
Octopus Salad.....	67
Romanian Polenta with Sour Cream.....	50
Scallops and Truffles with Beef Marrow.....	32
Shrimp with Pancetta and Rosemary.....	67
Sri Lankan Crêpes with Coconut Sambol.....	12
Stuffed Cherry Peppers.....	67
Stuffed Mussels.....	66
Stuffed Zucchini.....	67
Sweet and Sour Sardines.....	67
Venetian Rice Fritters.....	66
Venetian Tea Sandwiches.....	67
Yogurt and Cucumber Dip.....	77

Main Dishes

<i>Meat and Poultry</i>	
Braised Lamb Shanks.....	32
Chicken with Paprika.....	50
Chicken and Walnut Stew.....	76
Devised Baby Back Ribs.....	32
Grilled Sausages.....	50
Herb Meatballs in Tomato-Plum Sauce.....	77
New England-Style Baked Beans.....	39
Pork-and-Rice Meatball Soup.....	50
Pork with Apples and Cider Cream Sauce.....	51
Spiced Chicken and Tomato Kebabs.....	76
Veal and Kidney Bean Stew.....	76

Vegetarian

Iranian Noodle Soup.....	76
Lima Beans with Dill and Eggs.....	76

Condiments

Eggplant and Herb Pickle.....	77
Pickled Cabbage and Dill.....	77
Red Onion and Herb Pickles.....	77

Desserts & Drinks

Apricot Cake.....	51
Caramel Cake.....	58
Caraway Brandy.....	51
Coconut Cake.....	58
Fermented Plum Brandy.....	51
Lemon Layer Cake.....	58
Red Velvet Cake.....	58
Romanian Walnut Panettone.....	50
Smith Island Cake.....	24
Walnut Spice Cake.....	59

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THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

In producing the stories for this issue, we discovered ingredients and information too good to keep to ourselves. Please feel free to raid our pantry!

BY BEN MIMS

Fare

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When planning your trip to Virginia's Eastern Shore, contact **Virginia Tourism** (804/545-5500; virginia.org).

Ingredient

To make the beef marrow and scallops (see [page 32](#)), purchase **split marrow bones**, available from Debragga.com (\$35 for twelve 4" bones; 212/924-1311; debragga.com).

Essay

For the books featured in Aleksandra Crapanzano's "Toujours Paris" essay (see [page 34](#)), buy **The Paris Cookbook** by Patricia Wells (Harper Collins, 2001; \$20); **Paris Sweets: Great Desserts from the City's Best Pastry Shops** by Dorie Greenspan (Broadway Books, 2002; \$18); **Parisian Home Cooking: Conversations, Recipes, and Tips from the Cooks and Food Merchants of Paris** by Michael Roberts (William Morrow, 1999; \$30); **Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris** by A.J. Liebling (Simon and Schuster, 1962; \$10); **Remembrance of Things Paris: Sixty Years of Writing from Gourmet** by Gourmet ed. and Ruth Reichl (Modern Library, 2004; \$11); **Blue Trout and Black Truffles: The Perigrinations of an Epicure** by Joseph Wechsberg (Knopf, 1954; \$12); **Trifles Make Perfection** by Joseph Wechsberg and David A. Morowitz (David R. Godine, 1999; \$13); **Paris Patisseries: History, Shops, Recipes** by Ghislaine Bavoillot, Christian Sarramon, and Pierre Hermé (Flammarion, 2010; \$26); **The Sweet Life in Paris: Delicious Adventures in the World's Most Glorious, and Perplexing, City** by David Lebovitz (Broadway Books, 2009; \$11); and **Paris From Above** by Yann Arthus-Bertrand (Chêne, 2010; \$48), all from Amazon.com.

Classic

For the best beans to make the baked beans recipe (see [page 38](#)), contact Kalustyan's (800/352-3451; kalustyans

.com) for the **navy beans** (\$7.99 for a 14-ounce bag) **soldier beans** (\$7.99 for a 14-ounce bag), the **yellow eye beans** (\$8.99 for a 14-ounce bag; look for "Steuben yellow-eye beans"), and the **Jacob's cattle beans** (\$9.99 for a 14-ounce bag).

Southern Cakes

To prepare the coconut cake recipe (see [page 58](#)), buy a **rotary coconut grater**, available from Home Discount Store (\$35; look for "coconut scraper with vacuum base"; 724/510-8533; homediscountstor.com).

Cicheti

While in Venice, stay at the **Molino Stucky Hilton** hotel (39/41/272-3490; molinostuckyhilton.com).

Iran

To prepare the Iranian noodle soup recipe (see [page 76](#)), buy **reshteh noodles**, available from OnlineFoodGrocery.com (\$1.38 for a 12-ounce package; 800/720-9350; onlinefoodgrocery.com). To make the veal and kidney bean stew recipe (see [page 76](#)), use **fenugreek seeds** (\$5.99 for a 3-ounce pack), **dried black limes** (\$7.99 for a 4-ounce pack), and **lavash** (\$5.99 for a 16-ounce bag), available from Kalustyan's (see above). To prepare the spiced chicken and tomato kebabs recipe (see [page 76](#)), buy **ground sumac**, available from Sayad Market (\$2.25 for a 4-ounce package; 860/666-7846; sayadmarket.com) and **lavash**, available from Kalustyan's (see above). To make the chicken and walnut stew recipe (see [page 76](#)), purchase **pomegranate molasses**, available from Indian Foods Company (\$6.99 for a 10-ounce bottle; 866/331-7684; store.indianfoodsco.com). To prepare the herb meatballs in tomato-plum sauce (see [page 77](#)), buy **Persian dried sour plums**, available from Fastachi (\$6.99 for 1 pound; 800/466-3022; fastachi.

com). To make the yogurt and cucumber dip (see [page 77](#)), use **dried rose petals**, available from Amazon.com (\$24.99 for a 1 pound; amazon.com). To prepare the baked rice with barberries (see [page 77](#)), purchase **barberries**, available from Indian Foods Company (\$8.99 for a 4-ounce pack; 866/331-7684; store.indianfoodsco.com). For the red onion and herb pickles recipe (see [page 77](#)), use **nigella seeds**, available from The Great American Spice Company (\$6.02 for a 4-ounce pack; 877/677-4239; americanspice.com).

Kitchen

For the ingredients in our Iranian glossary (see [page 79](#)), purchase **Persian dried sour plums**, available from Fastachi (see above); **powdered whey**, available from Barry Farm (\$3 for a 1-pound bag; 419/741-0155; barryfarm.com); **sour grapes**, available from Mama's Lebanese Kitchen (\$2.15 for a 1-ounce package; look for ground sour grapes; 888/549-8862; mamaslebaneskitchen.com); **reshteh noodles**, available from OnlineFoodGrocery.com (see above); **ground sumac**, available from Sayad Market (see above); **nigella seeds**, available from the Great American Spice Company (see above); **pomegranate molasses**, available from Indian Foods Company (see above); **barberries**, available from Indian Foods Company (see above); **dried black limes**, available from Kalustyan's (see above); and **dried rose petals**, available from Amazon.com (see above).

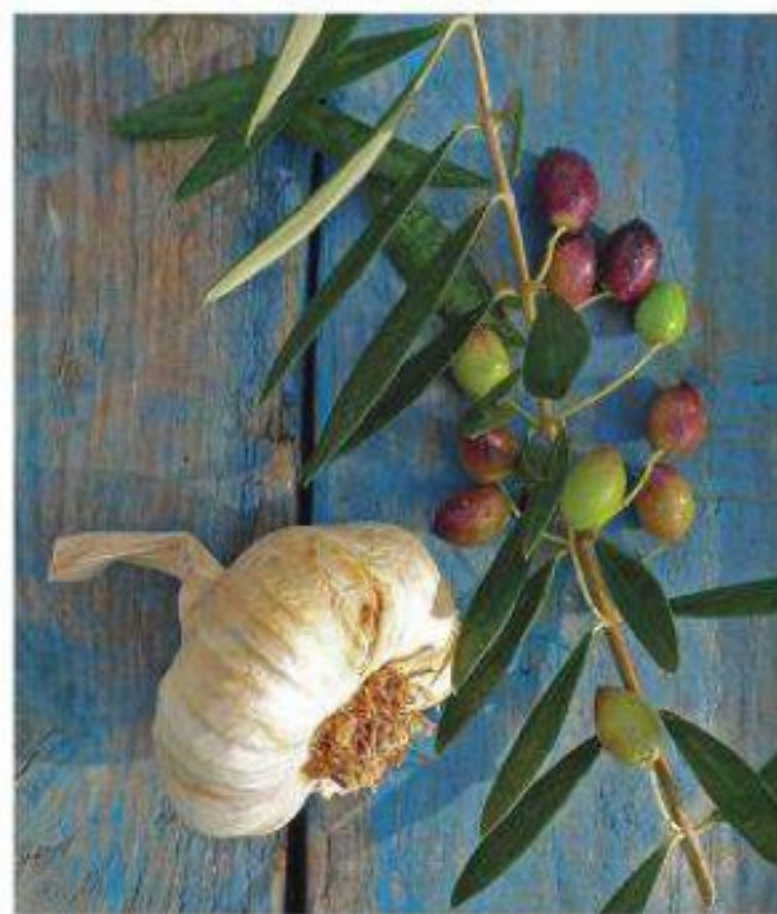
Correction

In "Flower Power" on page 20 of our November 2011 issue (#142), Victory Hop Wallop Ale was incorrectly identified as a fresh-hop beer. Victory Brewing Company's fresh-hop beers, available only at the brewery, are Harvest Ale and Harvest Pils.



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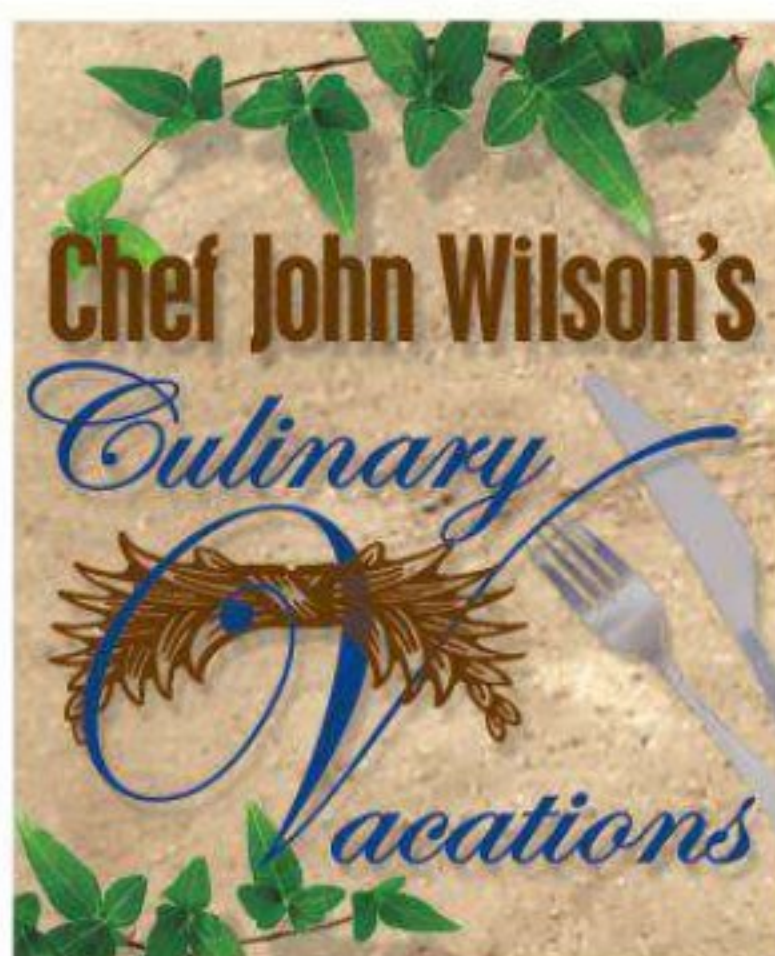
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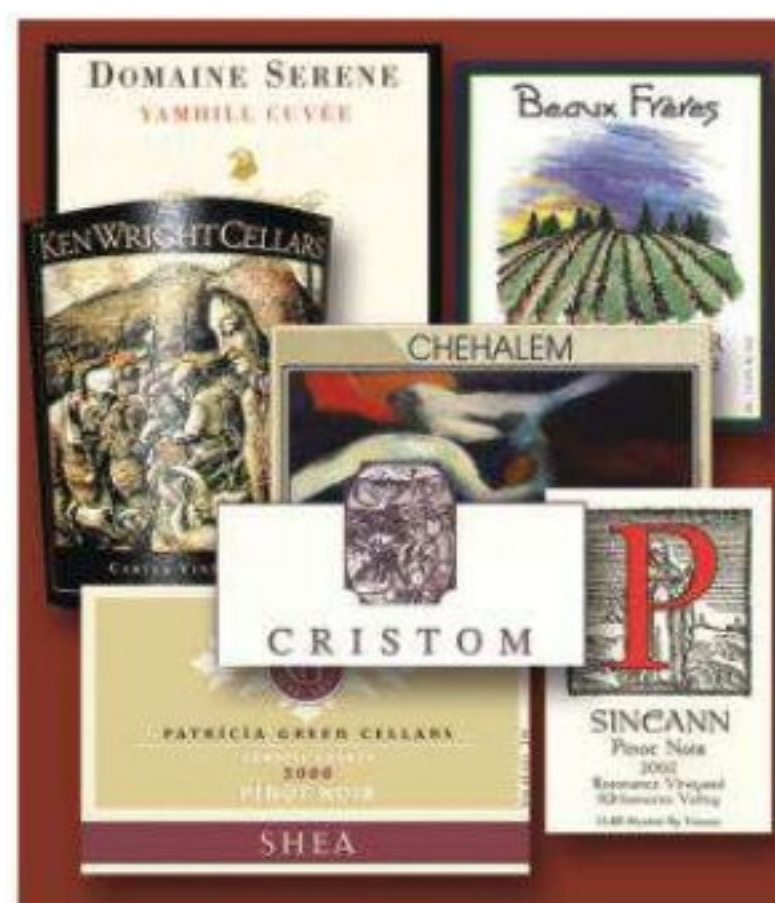


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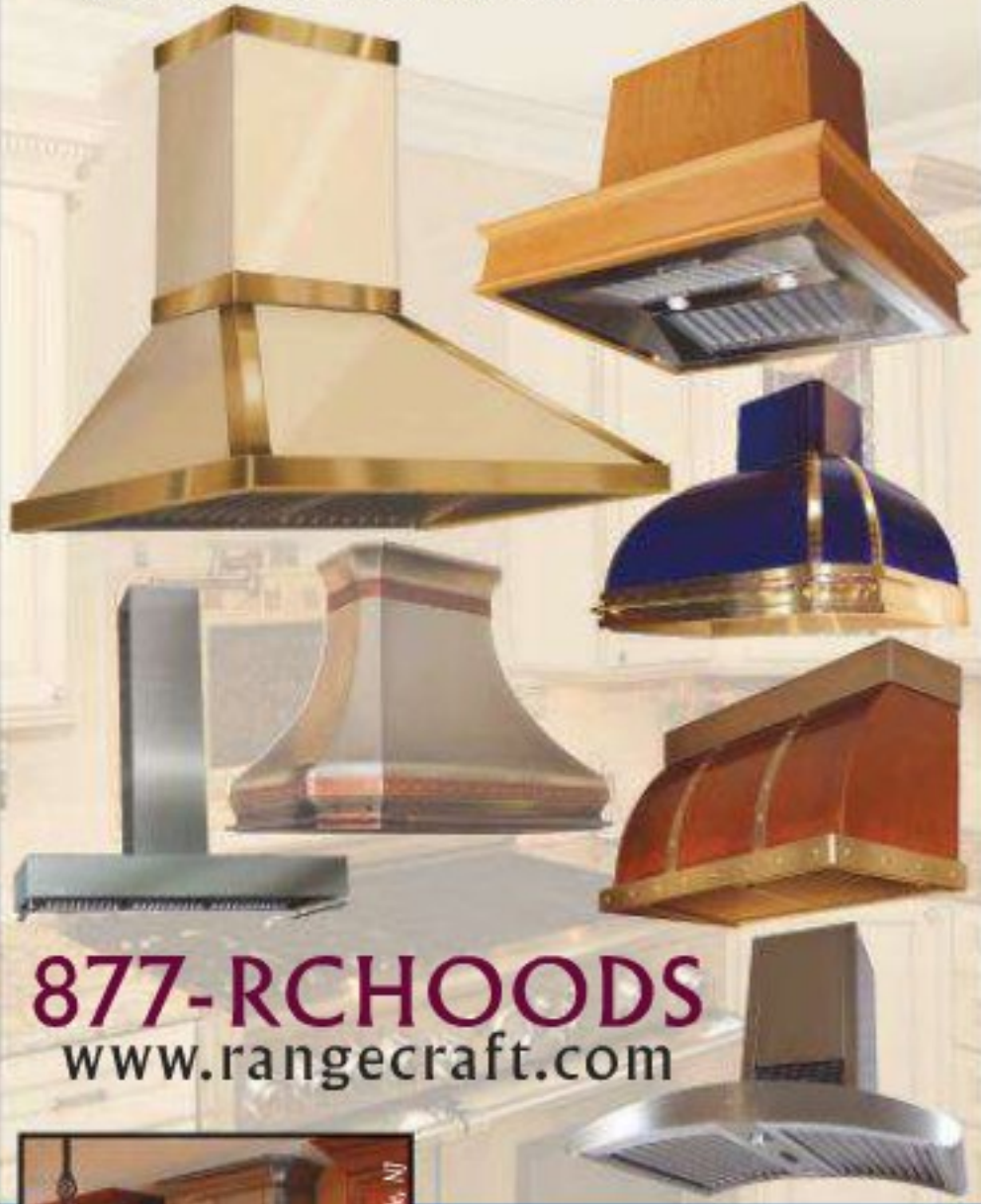
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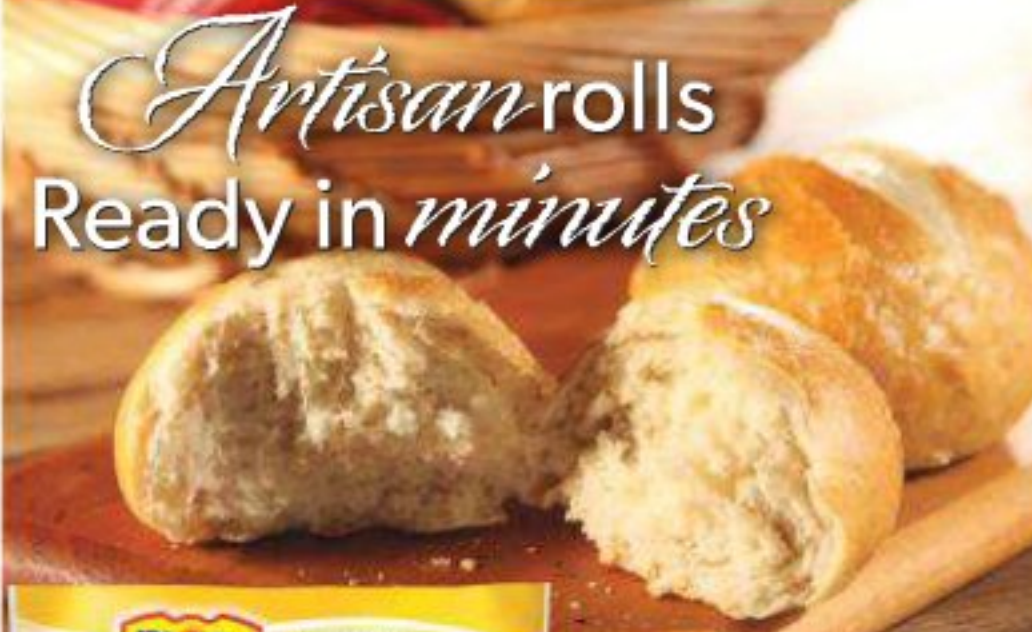
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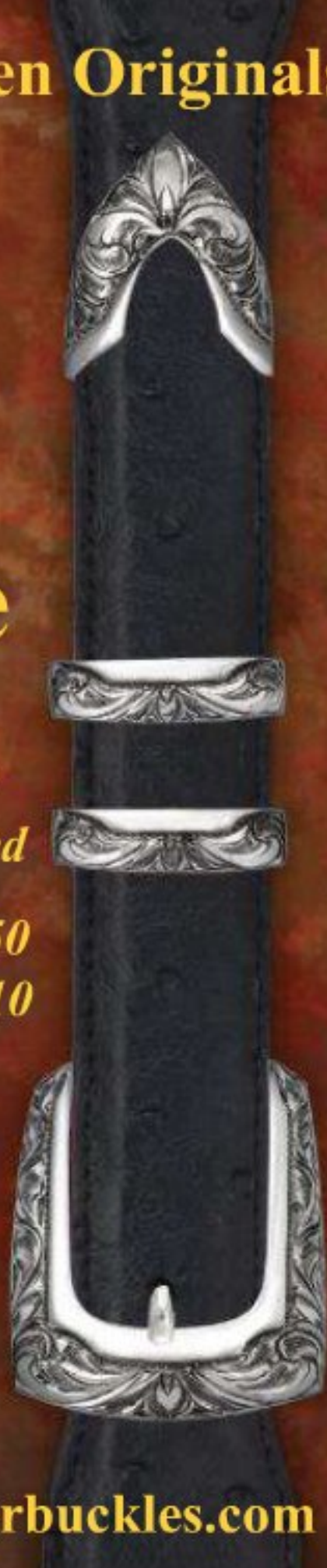


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